

Paroma Chatterjee

# The Living Icon in Byzantium and Italy

The Vita Image,  
Eleventh to Thirteenth Centuries



CAMBRIDGE



## THE LIVING ICON IN BYZANTIUM AND ITALY

*The Living Icon in Byzantium and Italy* is the first book to explore the emergence and function of a novel pictorial format in the Middle Ages, the *vita* icon, which displayed the magnified portrait of a saint framed by scenes from his or her life. While the East used the *vita* icon for depicting the most popular figures in the Orthodox calendar, the Latin West deployed it most vigorously in the service of Francis of Assisi. This book offers a compelling account of how this type of image embodied and challenged the prevailing structures of vision, representation, and sanctity in Byzantium and among the Franciscans in Italy between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries. Through the lens of this format, Paroma Chatterjee uncovers the complexities of the philosophical and theological issues that had long engaged both the medieval East and West, such as the fraught relations between words and images, relics and icons, a representation and its subject, and the very nature of holy presence.

Paroma Chatterjee is Assistant Professor, History of Art, at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. Her research has been supported by a Dumbarton Oaks Junior Fellowship, a Samuel H. Kress Travel Fellowship, a Mellon dissertation writing fellowship, a Penn Humanities Forum post-doctoral fellowship, a post-doctoral fellowship at the Italian Academy for Advanced Studies in America, and a Millard Meiss Publication Grant. Her work has appeared in, or is forthcoming from, the *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, *Art History*, *Word & Image*, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, *Oxford Art Journal*, and *RES: The Journal of Anthropology and Aesthetics*.



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Centuries

PAROMA CHATTERJEE

University of Michigan, Ann Arbor



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*To my parents*

---

ARJUNA: Lord, show me your immutable self.

KRISHNA: Behold, then, my myriad forms, hundreds and thousands, in many colors . . .

*Bhagavad Gita*, chapter 11



# CONTENTS

<i>List of Illustrations</i>	page ix
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xiii
Introduction: The Metaphor of the “Living Icon”	1
1 The Saint in the Text	30
2 The Saint in the Image	67
3 “Wrought by the Finger of God”	127
4 Depicting Francis’s Secret	163
Epilogue: Francis in Constantinople	207
<i>Notes</i>	219
<i>Bibliography</i>	247
<i>Index</i>	261



## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

### Color Plates

- I Artist painting an icon (detail), fol. 328v, ninth century, Parisinus Graecus 923, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, France
- II *Vita* icon of St. Catherine, late twelfth to early thirteenth century, Monastery of St. Catherine, Sinai, Egypt
- III St. Francis and scenes from his life and afterlife, by Bonaventura Berlinghieri, 1235, Pescia, Italy
- IV Templon beam depicting the Twelve Feasts, eleventh to twelfth centuries, Monastery of St. Catherine, Sinai, Egypt
- V Templon beam depicting the Twelve Feasts, eleventh to twelfth centuries, Monastery of St. Catherine, Sinai, Egypt
- VI Menologion icon for the month of August, twelfth century, Monastery of St. Catherine, Sinai, Egypt
- VII Templon beams depicting the posthumous miracles of St. Eustratios, twelfth century, Monastery of St. Catherine, Sinai, Egypt
- VIII *Vita* icon of St. Nicholas, late twelfth to early thirteenth century, Monastery of St. Catherine, Sinai, Egypt
- IX *Vita* icon of St. George, late twelfth to early thirteenth century, Monastery of St. Catherine, Sinai, Egypt
- X *Vita* icon of St. George, late twelfth to early thirteenth century, Byzantine Museum, Athens, Greece
- XI St. John the Baptist, icon, thirteenth century, Monastery of St. Catherine, Sinai, Egypt

- XII St. Francis receiving the stigmata, 1240–70, panel, Gallerie delle Uffizi, Florence, Italy
- XIII St. Francis and scenes from his life, 1240s/1260s, panel, Bardi Chapel, S. Croce, Florence, Italy
- XIV St. Francis rescues a lamb; the stigmatization of St. Francis; St. Francis purchases two lambs taken to market; St. Francis does public penance (details), Bardi panel, Florence, Italy
- XV St. Francis and scenes from his life and afterlife, 1250s, Museo Civico, Pistoia, Italy
- XVI St. Francis and posthumous miracles, c. 1253, Treasury of S. Francesco, Assisi, Italy
- Color plates follow page [xvi](#).

## Figures

- |    |   |                |
|----|---|----------------|
| 1  | Scenes from the life of St. Nicholas, Byzantine, eleventh century, Monastery of St. Catherine, Sinai, Egypt                   | <i>page 79</i> |
| 2  | St. Nicholas appearing to the eparch, Ablabius (detail), <i>vita</i> icon of St. Nicholas                                     | 92             |
| 3  | The three soldiers imprisoned (detail), <i>vita</i> icon of St. Nicholas  | 93             |
| 4  | The three soldiers thank St. Nicholas (detail), <i>vita</i> icon of St. Nicholas  | 95             |
| 5  | <i>Vita</i> icon of St. Nicholas, late twelfth to early thirteenth century (detail), Monastery of St. Catherine, Sinai, Egypt | 96             |
| 6  | St. Nicholas expelling demons at sea (detail), <i>vita</i> icon of St. Nicholas   | 99             |
| 7  | St. Nicholas celebrating at the altar (detail), <i>vita</i> icon of St. Nicholas  | 100            |
| 8  | St. Nicholas rescues the child Basil from the Saracens (detail), <i>vita</i> icon of St. Nicholas                             | 101            |
| 9  | St. George giving away his belongings, top row (detail), <i>vita</i> icon of St. George                                       | 104            |
| 10 | St. George being beaten, top row (detail), <i>vita</i> icon of St. George   | 105            |
| 11 | St. George's tortures, left grid (detail), <i>vita</i> icon of St. George   | 106            |
| 12 | St. George being scraped, right grid (detail), <i>vita</i> icon of St. George   | 108            |
| 13 | St. George instigating the fall of idols and the resurrection of the ox, bottom row (detail), <i>vita</i> icon of St. George  | 109            |

- 14 The funeral of St. George, bottom row (detail), *vita* icon of St. George 110
- 15 *Vita* icon of St. John the Baptist, late twelfth to early thirteenth century, Monastery of St. Catherine, Sinai, Egypt 116
- 16 “I must be baptized by you,” the Baptist bowing to Christ (detail), *vita* icon of St. John the Baptist 117
- 17 The Baptist baptizing Christ (detail), *vita* icon of St. John the Baptist 119
- 18 The beheading of the Baptist (detail), *vita* icon of St. John the Baptist 120
- 19 The Baptist’s head being borne to Herod’s court (detail), *vita* icon of St. John the Baptist 121
- 20 The diabolical dance at Herod’s court (detail), *vita* icon of St. John the Baptist 121
- 21 Elizabeth and Zacharias embrace (detail), *vita* icon of St. John the Baptist 122
- 22 The Baptist’s head unearthed (detail), *vita* icon of St. John the Baptist 122
- 23 The cure of the girl with the twisted neck (detail), St. Francis and scenes from his life and afterlife, by Bonaventura Berlinghieri, 1235, Pescia, Italy 175
- 24 The stigmatization of St. Francis (detail), St. Francis and scenes from his life and afterlife, by Bonaventura Berlinghieri, 1235, Pescia, Italy 176
- 25 The cure of the crippled man (detail), St. Francis and scenes from his life and afterlife, by Bonaventura Berlinghieri, 1235, Pescia, Italy 178
- 26 The preaching to the birds (detail), St. Francis and scenes from his life and afterlife, by Bonaventura Berlinghieri, 1235, Pescia, Italy 179
- 27 The miracle of the pear (detail), St. Francis and scenes from his life and afterlife, by Bonaventura Berlinghieri, 1235, Pescia, Italy 180
- 28 The cure of the demoniacs (detail), St. Francis and scenes from his life and afterlife, by Bonaventura Berlinghieri, 1235, Pescia, Italy 182
- 29 St. Francis released by his mother; St. Francis renouncing his goods; St. Francis tracing the habit (details), Bardi panel, Florence, Italy 188
- 30 The miracle of the crib at Greccio (detail), Bardi panel, Florence, Italy 191

- |    |   |     |
|----|---|-----|
| 31 | A crippled being cured and a procession of penitents (detail), Bardi panel, Florence, Italy                                       | 196 |
| 32 | The miraculous vision at Arles (detail), Bardi panel, Florence, Italy   | 197 |
| 33 | St. Francis preaching in church (detail), St. Francis and scenes from his life and afterlife, 1250s, Museo Civico, Pistoia, Italy | 201 |
| 34 | St. Francis's funeral (detail), St. Francis and scenes from his life and afterlife, 1250s, Museo Civico, Pistoia, Italy           | 202 |

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Plate I. Artist painting an icon (detail), fol. 328v, ninth century, Parisinus Graecus 923, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, France. Courtesy of the Bridgeman Art Library, New York.



Plate II. *Vita* icon of St. Catherine, late twelfth to early thirteenth century, Monastery of St. Catherine, Sinai, Egypt. Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

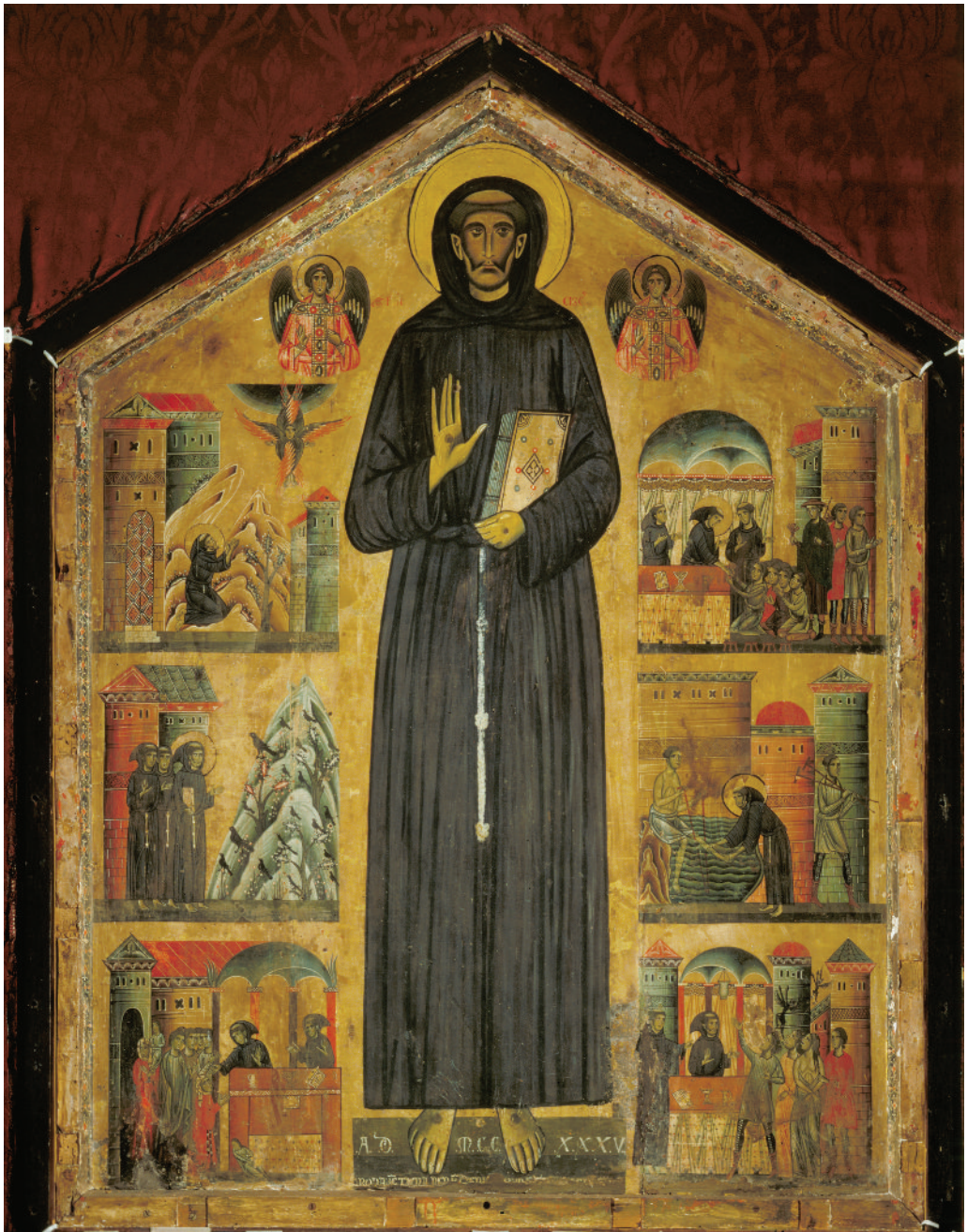


Plate III. St. Francis and scenes from his life and afterlife, by Bonaventura Berlinghieri, 1235, Pescia, Italy. Courtesy of Art Resource, New York.

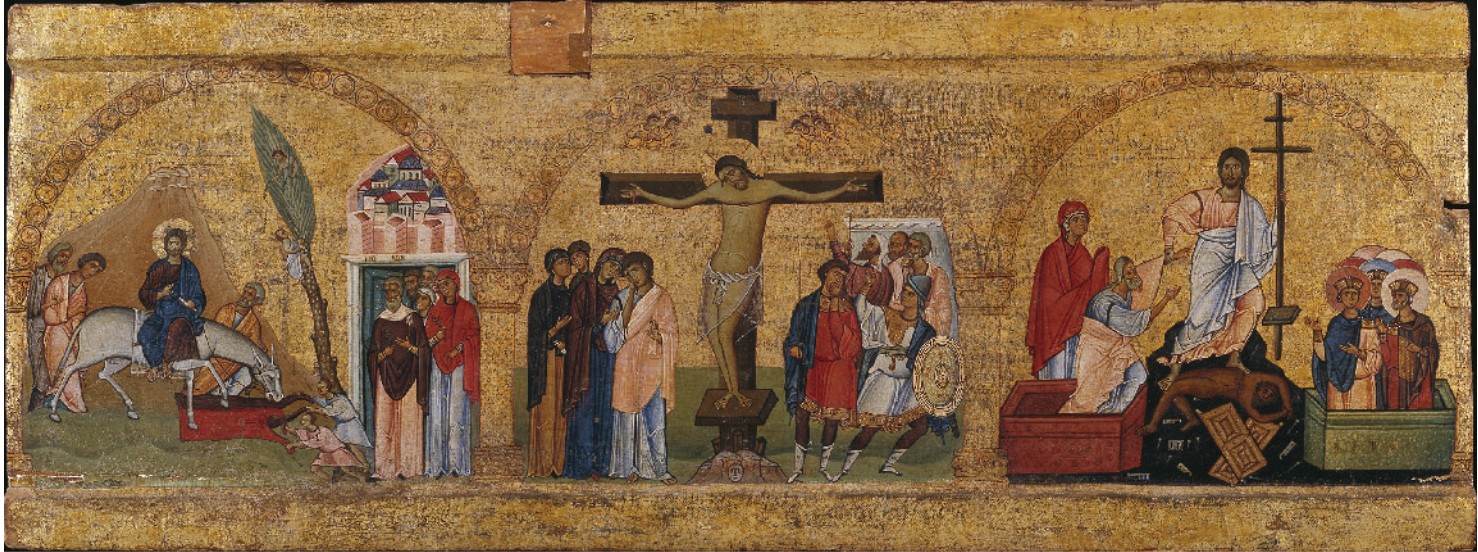


Plate IV. Templon beam depicting the Twelve Feasts, eleventh to twelfth centuries, Monastery of St. Catherine, Sinai, Egypt. Courtesy of the Monastery of St. Catherine, Sinai, Egypt.



Plate V. Templon beam depicting the Twelve Feasts, eleventh to twelfth centuries, Monastery of St. Catherine, Sinai, Egypt. Courtesy of the Monastery of St. Catherine, Sinai, Egypt.



Plate VI. Menologion icon for the month of August, twelfth century, Monastery of St. Catherine, Sinai, Egypt. Courtesy of the Monastery of St. Catherine, Sinai, Egypt.





Plate VII. Templon beams depicting the posthumous miracles of St. Eustratios, twelfth century, Monastery of St. Catherine, Sinai, Egypt. Courtesy of the Monastery of St. Catherine, Sinai, Egypt.



Plate VIII. *Vita* icon of St. Nicholas, late twelfth to early thirteenth century, Monastery of St. Catherine, Sinai, Egypt. Courtesy of the Bridgeman Art Library, New York.



Plate IX. *Vita* icon of St. George, late twelfth to early thirteenth century, Monastery of St. Catherine, Sinai, Egypt. Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of New York.



Plate X. *Vita* icon of St. George, late twelfth to early thirteenth century, Byzantine Museum, Athens, Greece. Courtesy of Art Resource, NY.



Plate XI. St. John the Baptist, icon, thirteenth century, Monastery of St. Catherine, Sinai, Egypt. Courtesy of the Monastery of St. Catherine, Sinai, Egypt.



Plate XII. St. Francis receiving the stigmata, 1240–70, panel, Gallerie delle Uffizi, Florence, Italy. Courtesy of Art Resource, NY.



Plate XIII. St. Francis and scenes from his life, 1240s/1260s, panel, Bardi Chapel, S. Croce, Florence, Italy. Courtesy of the Bridgeman Art Library, New York.



Plate XIV. St. Francis rescues a lamb; the stigmatization of St. Francis; St. Francis purchases two lambs taken to market; St. Francis does public penance (details), Bardi panel, Florence, Italy. Courtesy of the Bridgeman Art Library, New York.





Plate XV. St. Francis and scenes from his life and afterlife, 1250s, Museo Civico, Pistoia, Italy. Courtesy of the Museo Civico, Pistoia, Italy.



Plate XVI. St. Francis and posthumous miracles, c. 1253, Treasury of S. Francesco, Assisi, Italy. © G. Ruf / [www.assisi.de](http://www.assisi.de).

## INTRODUCTION: THE METAPHOR OF THE “LIVING ICON”

The late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries saw the emergence of a strikingly novel pictorial format in parts of the Byzantine Empire. Displaying the portrait of a saint surrounded on all four or fewer sides by scenes from his or her life, the so-called *vita* icon depicted some of the most popular figures in the Orthodox calendar, including Nicholas, George, and John the Baptist. The clarity and efficacy of the format evidently enabled its popularity; by the thirteenth century, it was being deployed to depict various holy figures in the Latin West as well. Of these western examples, the most concentrated and imaginative use of the *vita* image occurred in the realm of the Franciscans in the first half of the duecento, to honor their flamboyantly charismatic founder, Francis of Assisi.

This book investigates the conditions that enabled the emergence of the *vita* image in Byzantium and among the Franciscans, and its varied functions. It argues that the image type was a powerfully pungent expression of the ontological complexities intrinsic to the identity of the medieval saint, in both the Byzantine East and the Latin West (particularly in the case of Francis of Assisi, who shattered normative conceptions of saintly behavior by conforming only too perfectly to its ideals). The juxtaposition of a magnified portrait at the center of a panel flanked by smaller episodes both presented a satisfyingly synoptic view of the saint in question and distilled a stunning critique of the prevailing structures of vision, representation, and sanctity. The format engaged with urgent theological and philosophical issues that had long vexed the

medieval East and West, such as the similarities and differences between words and images, between relics and icons, between a representation and its subject, and the very nature of holy presence.

That these issues were not (perhaps never) satisfactorily resolved but remained the subject of fierce debates is evident from the fact that the *vita* image first emerged in Byzantium well after the end of Iconoclasm in 843 CE. By then, one might presume that the “problem” of the *eikon* (image) and its relationship to holy presence had already been dealt with. But an examination of the lives of saints in texts and images after Iconoclasm proves otherwise. As we shall see, the icon was the subject of continuous reflection among the Byzantines, and it is in the realm of hagiography that we find some of the most creative and challenging propositions regarding its creation, description, and reception. The saint, in other words, was the crucible on which concepts and practices concerning visual representation were tested. For the Franciscans, on the other hand, the hagiographic project itself was fraught with problems. Writers and painters commissioned to describe the life of Francis faced inordinate – even, arguably unprecedented – challenges, in having to describe the phenomenon of the stigmatization and its effects on a mortal human body. As this book shows, the *vita* format furnished the most effective pictorial expression to those challenges. The image type, then, was not merely an agent of spiritual instruction, or a didactic tool propounding the life of the saint depicted, or a useful pictorial accompaniment to the liturgical celebration of the holy one, although it undoubtedly performed all these roles. Along with them – and more importantly – the format proffered a pithily complex commentary on the possibilities and limits of visual mediation in the very definition of a saint.

This, for all the ubiquity of sacred persons and their images in the medieval era, was no simple task. For one, the markers signifying sainthood were remarkably tenuous. As Aviad Kleinberg remarks, “The medieval perception of sainthood was fluid. . . . Medieval communities venerated simultaneously very different individuals . . . indifferent to the logical contradictions such behavior entailed.”<sup>1</sup> Apart from the sheer variety of saintly types (e.g., martyrs, virgins, confessors, and children), the very substance of sanctity was perceived as precariously unstable and labile in the period. Even while retaining a completely human

form, the saint was also invested with divine grace. He or she was regarded as a conduit between the human and divine realms, thus partaking of both. Moreover, as an imitator of Christ (whether in literal or nonliteral terms), the saint was perceived to be constantly engaged in a process of the *representation* of holiness; a representation whose benchmark was the figure of Christ. When hagiographers undertook to honor, proclaim, and describe the lives of the saints, they had to grapple with the inevitable tensions that resulted from presenting, on the one hand, a seemingly unified, coherent saintly identity and, on the other, a unique charisma that could not be explained but by the contingency of divine favor, and the continuous ontological transformations sustained by the holy one over a lifetime. Representations in words and images conferred a retrospective semblance of unity and cohesion on what was, in fact, an enterprise of the utmost contingency and chance, and manifested itself as such.

These points are borne out by a remarkably suggestive and well-known but rarely analyzed passage, which highlights the difficulties of capturing not just the saint in words and images but also the complexities of reception that underpin reading or looking at a saint’s life. With uncharacteristic ruefulness (and, one suspects, a certain disingenuousness), Basil of Caesarea wrote to Gregory of Nyssa, pondering over all that he should have done in order to be a worthy Christian. In the process, he made the following analogy:

Καὶ πανταχοῦ ὡσπερ οἱ ζωγράφοι, ὅταν ἀπὸ εἰκόνων εἰκόνας γράφωσι, πυκνὰ πρὸς τὸ παράδειγμα ἀποβλέποντες, τὸν ἐκειθεν χαρακτῆρα πρὸς τὸ ἑαυτῶν σπουδάζουσι μεταθεῖναι φιλοτέχνημα. οὕτω δεῖ καὶ τὸν ἐσπουδακότα ἑαυτὸν πᾶσι τοῖς μέρεσι τῆς ἀρετῆς ἀπεργάσασθαι, τέλειον, οἰοεὶ πρὸς ἀγαλματὰ τινα κινούμενα καὶ ἔμπρακτα, τοὺς βίους τῶν ἁγίων ἀποβλέπειν, καὶ τὸ ἐκείνων ἀγαθὸν οἰκεῖον ποιῆσθαι διὰ μιμήσεως.

Thus, as painters, when they are painting from other pictures, look closely at the model, and do their best to transfer its characteristics to their own artfully wrought work, so too must he who is desirous of rendering himself perfect in all branches of excellence, keep his eyes turned to the lives of the saints as though to living and moving statues, and make their virtue his own by imitation.<sup>2</sup>

The metaphor of the “living statue” was important to the Byzantines.<sup>3</sup> Not only was Basil himself described as one;<sup>4</sup> we also find his exhortation

repeated in a ninth-century manuscript of the *Sacra Parallela*, a compilation of scriptural writings currently located in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris.<sup>5</sup> The passage in the manuscript, on folio 328 verso, is accompanied by an image (Plate I). An artist sketches on a panel from an icon, which is presumably the image of a saint. The artist is engaged in copying the icon; the corner of the latter grazes the side of the panel in his hand, thus hinting at the genealogical link (here expressed as a tactile connection) between the model and its copy. Relic-like, the completed icon imparts its touch to the icon in progress and legitimizes it. The artist is carefully positioned outside the tactile chain. Even though he holds the panel and is cast in the role of the “artful” manufacturer, his activity is confined to transcribing the icon’s “characteristics.” This is emphasized by his staring eyes, trained in the direction of the completed image, even as his hand moves in the process of tracing its contours. This artist is a transmitter, not a creator. Although he is the largest figure in the ensemble, the importance that accrues to size is undermined by his position. Shown in a three-quarter view, he is subordinated to the frontal gaze of the icon, which confronts the viewer directly. This vignette with its encapsulation of some of the fundamental principles of Byzantine image theory – and its concomitant ambiguity about the relative importance of the artist – depicts a process analogous to the cultivation of Christian virtue and saintly emulation, as per Basil’s injunction. Artistic manufacture is likened to the inculcation of ethics.

Yet, being a good Christian is a somewhat more complicated procedure than the image would suggest. For one, it involves a different set of maneuvers on the part of the person “desirous of rendering himself perfect” from those enacted by the artist. The zealous Christian must look at the lives of the saints (presumably in their written and oral versions) as if they are statues. Indeed, the image right above that of our artist depicts a bearded figure pointing at the adjoining column of text. The inclusion of the artist below, with his hand and gaze pointing toward the completed icon, underscores the literal transition from the written to the pictorial to which Basil prompts us.

However, the church father adds a further layer of complexity to his analogy: the statues fashioned by the beholder (whether in his mind, in stone or metal, or in some other material) must be “living and moving.” Where the artist is permitted the ease of operating within a single

medium (he “paints [pictures] from other pictures”), is endowed with the ability of artful manufacture, and is expressly posited as one who conveys a preexisting set of pictorial coordinates, the Christian must perform a more arduous set of tasks. He must switch between media and become, to a certain extent, a creator. He must transform a hagiographic text into an image, and the image into a mobile quantity invested with the full power of its moral significance. As if that were not complicated enough, the “image” referred to here could take on another, less literal dimension. As Stratis Papaioannou has shown, a “living statue” in Byzantium could allude not only to a beautifully carved and sculpted exterior, endowed with a similarly beautiful, or virtuous interior; it could also indicate a perfectly formed verbal discourse, in which style and content, beauty of expression and truthfulness of spirit, were harmoniously mingled.<sup>6</sup> In keeping with this formulation, then, our good Christian must be skilled at handling matter (be it words, paint, stones, or metals) *and* the nature, or spirit, of the saint in bringing about his “living statue.” Only when exterior and interior, style and content, are in perfect concord, can such a being be said to have been wrought.

As if to hint at these (more difficult) transformations, one entire side of the icon in the Paris manuscript brushes against the text column, the image emanating from the letters, as it were – the pictorial taking shape from the verbal. But the transition of the image into a “living” entity is not pictured, or at least not directly. Broken down, Basil’s instructions are not as straightforward, and his analogy is not as seamless, as they appear to be at first glance. Small wonder, then, that the manuscript illustrates only the first part of the passage and not the second.

This book suggests that the *vita* image best expresses the metaphor of the “living icon” in all its glorious nuance, with its array of questions (implicit and explicit) regarding the textual and visual depiction and reception of a saint. Scholarly consensus regards the *vita* images as instruments of instruction or propaganda, ideal for communicating those episodes that made the saint in question a holy figure. This argument, however, does not account for the reasons or the effects behind putting an enlarged portrait together with small-scale narrative scenes, nor does it explain the peculiar details animating those scenes, such as repetition, distortion, and sometimes, the outright defacement of the saint. This book examines the specific components of a handful of *vita*

images and offers an explanation as to why this format, over others, was deemed suitable to the various tasks at hand. And, as already suggested, the *vita* icon did indeed perform a set of highly important tasks. If the fifteenth century in Italy and Flanders is regarded as a period in which the pictorial possibilities of the frame, the icon, and narrative scenes were extended so as to combine the “vividness of the narrative . . . with the portrait character and direct appeal of the traditional icon,” as Sixten Ringbom puts it,<sup>7</sup> then the *vita* image in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries might be considered a decisive step in that direction, in light of its diffusion over Europe within that time and beyond. As we shall see, in some *vita* images the concept of the “traditional icon” is put to the test, as the depiction of the saint in the center of the panel hovers between a seemingly static, atemporal iconic formula and a narrative mode in which the depiction appears to allude to a specific moment in a temporal sequence.

The subject of time serves to remind us that the period under consideration in this book – from the eleventh up till the thirteenth century – is not merely dictated by the fact that that is when this particular image type gradually emerged and then flourished in the Byzantine East and among the Franciscans; these centuries are also marked by decisive intellectual developments (anxieties, even), which, I argue, directly impinged upon the creation of the *vita* image. The rest of this introduction presents the general background of those developments as a prelude to the specific issues discussed in the chapters to follow.

### The “Living Icon” and Its Problems

Byzantine thinkers in the eleventh century engaged in vigorous debates on the definition of the icon and modes of viewing it, as so persuasively shown by Charles Barber.<sup>8</sup> These debates found expression – indirectly but emphatically – in a range of textual and visual genres, among them the *vita* icon, until the ravaging of the empire in 1204 by the Fourth Crusade. The entire course of the thirteenth century, moreover, was significant for seeing some of the most innovative developments in saintly practice and imagery in Italy. In the first half of the duecento that peninsula witnessed an extraordinary (and, to some, even aberrant) phenomenon: the rise of St. Francis of Assisi, the *alter Christus*,<sup>9</sup> blessed



with the stigmata or the wounds of Christ. Several features of the emerging Franciscan literary and visual discourse intersect with the preoccupations of the Byzantines. In observing that “the servant of God is a kind of painting,”<sup>10</sup> Francis performed a self-referential gesture and implicitly designated his own body as a representation, adorned by the then tremendously controversial fact of the stigmata. Hagiographers consistently referred to Francis in terms of a picture painted over with Christ’s wounds, or a sculpture into whose surface God had carved out the stigmata with heavenly instruments. Deemed a “living icon” in his own right, Francis was the most audaciously literal example of that metaphor; one whose very person was conceived of as an image signed, sealed, and drawn upon by the finger of God.<sup>11</sup> The “living icon,” thus, was elaborated upon in texts and images in Byzantium (and somewhat in the medieval West), but attained its most spectacular expression in the person of a cloth merchant’s son hailing from Umbria. But how exactly was the concept of the “living icon” understood in Byzantium? And why did the Franciscans so insistently adopt its informing principles to describe their founder?

Modern scholarship furnishes some answers to these questions. Hans Belting, in his magisterial study *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art*, suggests that the “living icon” refers to the narrative and emotionally charged images of Christ’s Passion that arose in eleventh-century Byzantium. Demonstrating the seeds of the naturalistic style, which was supposedly refined by the Italian Renaissance, these icons were regarded as sufficiently lifelike to engender fine-tuned emotional responses.<sup>12</sup> As Anne Derbes and others have shown, the Franciscans, in particular, responded to these images and incorporated them into their repertoire.<sup>13</sup> Bissera V. Pentcheva, however, has nuanced Belting’s definition of the “living icon,” pointing out that the images in question are not, in fact, very naturalistic.<sup>14</sup> Pentcheva directs us instead to the interest in Neoplatonism in eleventh-century Byzantium, and accounts of public and private miracles that manifest a decided interest in the element of change in an image. The “living icon,” according to Pentcheva, is better defined as one that was perceived to evince a concrete transformation in its form, hue, or medium. This transformation was ostensibly triggered by the action of the Holy Spirit; a literal “in-spiriting” of the icon, causing it to be *empsychos*, or imbued with breath and life.

Both Belting and Pentcheva locate the conceptual core of the “living icon” in terms of its visual consequences in the Byzantine sphere. Stratis Papaioannou, on the other hand, has traced the metaphorical resonance of the expression in Byzantine literary genres.<sup>15</sup> His reading suggests that the phrase referred to an image, or a text, whose aesthetic or exterior qualities, apprehended by the senses, encompassed ineffable virtues that were less easily perceived, but which were nonetheless made manifest. A “living statue” was regarded as an object, the material appearance of which gradually enabled an apprehension of divine presence. The final product was one whose exterior and interior coexisted in perfect accord, and which had the power to move its viewers to cultivate similarly harmonious physical and spiritual selves.

Compelling as these interpretations are, I would suggest that there is yet another aspect to this rich metaphor, also rooted in Byzantium, that has not been explored. This aspect draws directly on the concept of the “living statue” as a potential site for the continuous generation of images and metaphors, and of the gradual manifestation of holy presence. My interpretation reverses the notion of the icon as a living or animated entity, designating instead a category of human beings endowed with the capacity to *become* an icon with all its powers and deficiencies. While this designation was sometimes applied to the Byzantine emperor, it is, I argue, particularly pertinent to our understanding of the Byzantine saint.

Gilbert Dagron has commented on the seemingly circular logic (the “vicious circle”) that linked icons and saints in Byzantine culture.<sup>16</sup> More often than not the saint appeared to a venerator resembling precisely his or her depiction in an image of which the venerator had had prior experience. As Dagron points out, the icon authenticated the identity of the saint, rather than the saint authenticating his or her pictorial depiction. This trope is so widespread in Byzantium that it is regarded as amounting to a “recipe . . . in handbooks on how to paint.”<sup>17</sup> I contend, however, that the trope functioned in an immeasurably wider capacity, one in which it was transformed into a rigorous hermeneutic that went beyond the question of identity. Rather than merely authenticating the saint as Cosmas, or Damian, or whomever, the very likeness between the icon and the saint prompted the viewer to distinguish between image and person. In other words, it is *because* the saint had the potential not

only to resemble his or her icon but also to become a living version of it, investing its matter with his or her presence, that the differences between the two entities – person and icon – had to be carefully gauged by venerator and viewers.

But the distinction between image and holy subject was both infinitely important and tantalizingly difficult to grasp. It hinged upon the definition of “presence” or *parousia* (*ousia* meaning “substance” or “essence”), and the definition of “image” or *eikon*. In marking the difference between presence and representation in the ninth century, Patriarch Nikephoros observed, “Making the absent present by showing forth the similarity and memory of its shape, [the icon] maintains [with its archetype] a relation stretching over time”<sup>18</sup> (Ὡς παρόντα γὰρ καὶ τὸν ἀποιχόμενον διὰ τε τῆς ἐμφερείας καὶ μνήμης ἢ μορφῆς ἐμφανίζουσα, συμπαραεκτεινομένην τῷ χρόνῳ διασώζει τὴν σχέσιν). The word *paronta*, here meaning “presence,”<sup>19</sup> is contrasted with *apochomonon*, which refers to that which is gone, departed, or perished.<sup>20</sup> *Parousia* literally brings that which is distant, or dead, to presence, and the present. The representation (*eikon*) and its subject, however, are clearly separate in Nikephoros’s formulation; they are brought into proximity by means of memory and likeness, but they are never identical. This demarcation led to a degree of confusion among clergy and laypeople alike. To give one example, Leo, a bishop of Chalcedon in the eleventh century, believed that the matter in which holy subjects were depicted was itself imbued with holiness, in stark contradiction of Nikephoros’s pronouncement, which emphasized a *relation* between the two emphatically not based on identity.<sup>21</sup> Leo, however, perceived divine presence in the icon and its materials, as well as in the subject it depicted. Such distinctions reveal the contested nature of the definition of presence and representation, despite attempts at formulating (and regulating?) them.

The issue of presence, in particular, was further muddled by the fact that a saint was regarded as a representation of Christ and, therefore, as a sign. In an important article, Cynthia Hahn points out that “signs are marked by absence, a sign represents something absent, just as specifically, saints renew the meaning of the absent Christ. Nevertheless, because of the mystery of grace, an absence can be present.”<sup>22</sup> She goes on to argue that “it is the genius of the hagiographic pictorial narrative

of the later Middle Ages that it was in some sense able to supercede the alienation of the sign and recover this power of the presence of Christ while at the same time giving the sign a ‘face.’”<sup>23</sup>

This book complicates the notion that the saint and his or her hagiography in text and image were always able to supersede their status as signs, and to capture presence (in all the contradictions evident in the understanding of that term). As we shall see, the saint often assumed a range of ontological identities during his or her lifetime and beyond, such as relics, visions, dreams, and shadows. Each of these states held a distinct valence – and a distinct measure of presence – for the Byzantines, as is evident from their commentaries on the status of dreams, the nature of apparitions, and the means of distinguishing between their “good” and “evil” manifestations (a point discussed in [Chapter 1](#)). The expression “living icon,” then, quite apart from its contextual meaning in various Byzantine texts, can be taken to encompass and reflect two essential facets of the scintillating ontology of the saint: first, his or her capacity to generate an array of diverse – sometimes overlapping and contiguous – states, such as dreams, visions, and relics, each of which was related mimetically to its holy subject, or prototype (*prototypos* in Greek); and, second, the differing degrees of presence that each of those states was perceived to embrace. The “living icon” was framed by the church fathers as a process occurring over such time as it took to cultivate virtue, and to match a handsome exterior to a correspondingly attractive interior. Similarly, I suggest that the different expressions of the saint (dreams, visions, etc.) were believed to manifest themselves over a period of time. The “living icon” thus came about as a consequence of this chain of states of being, of which it was one important element among several.

The awareness that holy presence was by no means an unvarying constant, and that it differed, both in its existence and in degrees in icons, relics, dreams, and visions, was sufficiently widespread. Accounts abound of venerators who recorded seeing the saint, or an icon of him or her, yield apparitions or the relics of the holy one, sometimes in rapid succession. The *Life of St. Nikon*, for instance, mentions an episode when a man praying in front of Nikon’s portrait was transported to the saint’s shrine where he experienced a healing miracle.<sup>24</sup> Interestingly, the episode distinguishes between Nikon’s portrait and Nikon’s shrine; it is the

latter that enables a complete apprehension of the saint’s presence by bringing about the cure of the afflicted venerator. Thus, the efficacy, experience, and, perhaps, the measure, of holy presence differ at each stage of the episode, from the portrait to the space of the shrine. [Chapter 1](#) investigates a series of such appearances in which the saint in question assumes (or has the potential to assume) a range of forms, each distinct from the other. As we shall see in [Chapter 2](#), images also made these apparitions – and their inherent distinctions – evident in innovative ways. For instance, the twelfth-century templon beam depicting the posthumous miracles of St. Eustratios depicts the saint as a vision, an epiphany, and a relic, in juxtaposition. Although the iconography defining Eustratios remains the same in each depiction, its uniformity is a spur to the viewer to gauge the distinct statuses he assumes in each context in which he appears.

The example of Eustratios (and others) leads to yet another important corollary of the “living icon”; the beholder of the saint’s image (and visions, relics, and dreams) was not expected to remain a passive recipient. Ideally, he or she displayed a similar flexibility as the “living icon” in the viewing and intellectual apprehension of what he or she saw. Gregory of Nazianzos attributed such an active role to a viewer when he commented that upon gazing on the “animate law” and “painted panel of virtue” that was Basil of Caesarea, the audience could learn to regulate its own life.<sup>25</sup> In the same vein, Michael Psellos commented in the eleventh century that “the . . . images of the Father do not themselves move, yet force their viewer to move.”<sup>26</sup> The “living icon” provoked a certain motion from its viewer, which could be purely internal or otherwise. Where the “living icon” of the saint was concerned, its audience was expected to distinguish between the various states assumed by the holy one. In addition, it invited a corresponding reciprocal gesture from the beholder; a mimetic reflex, whereby the latter, when confronted with a text describing the saint, either copied it or enabled its transition to a different medium, such as an image, and vice-versa. Not for nothing did medieval hagiographers often remark that they had purposely left their works unfinished, or that they had declined to include various miracles in their accounts that they could have added. These statements of glaring omission were invitations to the reader or listener to continue the narrative and, hopefully, to add his or her own experiences of the saint’s charisma to it – in short, to sustain and

extend the process of crafting the “living icon.” The practice of ekphrasis in particular, endemic to hagiographic production and consumption in the medieval era,<sup>27</sup> was a fitting response to a sacred narrative, striving as it did to conjure a vivid visual apprehension from a verbal delineation – a veritable “living icon,” as per the literal meaning embedded in St. Basil’s citation quoted at the beginning of this chapter.

If the “living icon” in Byzantium pointed to the ontological variations inherent to the saint, it was used in a similar capacity among the Franciscans as well; after all, Francis was just as capable of manifesting himself in visions and apparitions and as relics, as any of his holy counterparts in Byzantium or the Latin West. But at a fundamental level, the expression “living painting” occurs in Franciscan texts as a means of capturing the particular charisma of Francis’s stigmatized – and, therefore, immensely troublesome – body. Although self-proclaimed stigmatics existed before Francis, the fact of a stigmatized saint accepted and endorsed by the Roman Catholic Church – and moreover, one whose stigmata required celebration and dissemination in texts and images – created tremendous problems for the Franciscans. The strategy they deployed to counter this crisis in representation (for crisis is indeed what it amounted to) was to resort to drawing parallels between the phenomenon of the stigmatization and artistic practices. Francis’s body was advanced as the surface of a painting, or a document, that had received the touch of the divine and was consequently transformed, just as an artist or a scribe touches and transforms the material at his disposal. The “living icon,” in this context, is an expression that attempts to communicate Francis’s miraculous physical self, its unique exteriority, even more than the holiness that resides *within* him (although the latter was just as difficult to transmit by means of word and image). This is an inversion of the Byzantine sense of the metaphor. But it still preserves the element of change or transformation, and of the potential inherence of the divine in the “icon” that the medieval world would come to know as Francis of Assisi.

### The *Vita* Image as a Metapicture

The *vita* image constitutes a robust intellectual link between Byzantium and Italy, bridged by the concept of the “living icon.” Along with the well-studied images of the Virgin and Child,<sup>28</sup> the format instantiates yet

another, less studied example in which the rhetorical subtlety of the Byzantine icon is enlisted for a particular agenda when introduced in the Italian Peninsula. The format triggered a range of questions regarding representation and viewership that the Franciscans, no less than the Byzantines, were grappling with in the period under consideration.

To begin to understand the breadth of these questions, one must first recognize the *vita* images for the remarkable metapictures that they are. Although icons from the sixth century onward depict images within images, or “fictive icons” as Jeffrey Anderson terms them,<sup>29</sup> none displays the juxtaposition of such radical *kinds* of images on the same surface as the *vita* icon. In emphasizing the differences between the pictorial categories it consists of – the enlarged, hieratic portrait and the lively narrative scenes on a smaller scale – the format consciously refers to its own status as a set of depictions working in tandem across a single visual field. The combination of an icon with narrative scenes is provocative. The dialectic of center and frame echoes that of the relations between central, authoritative images and their marginal counterparts that we find in medieval manuscripts, church portals, and intimate objects.

The insertion of such a marginal frame, as Michael Camille has shown, always contains the potential for an embedded commentary or critique on representation.<sup>30</sup> Jaś Elsner has explored the differences in late antiquity in the kinds of visuality engaged by confronting an iconic deity head on and in the viewer’s relations to naturalistic representations in which the viewer stands as a voyeur looking in, separated from the scene owing to its internal self-sufficiency.<sup>31</sup> The composition of the *vita* image engages precisely these sorts of issues. The direct, unmediated gaze of the portrait that confronts the viewer is diluted in the narratives, in relation to which the viewer is (often, but not always) positioned as an outsider looking in. The *vita* image, thus, conflates two different kinds of spectatorship, bringing to the fore its potential for the critical appraisal of different regimes of visuality and the salient structures of representation. If the portrait is posited as a stable, scrupulously defined, instantly identifiable entity at the center of the panel, then the narratives systematically take those assumptions apart. Moreover, by depicting the saint in multiple scenes in multiple avatars, the entire image type comments on the possibilities of vision and of visual representation to capture diverse ontological states. Considered in this light, the nomenclature that

modern scholarship has bestowed on these icons – *vita* – is as misleading as it is fitting. The term implies a relatively straightforward depiction of a person’s life – which is indeed what the image displays. But the fact that the “life” in question is that of a saint, and therefore rife with transformations and manipulations of vision at various stages, is completely discounted.

Here, it is also useful to consider W. J. T. Mitchell’s identification of various kinds of metapictures: the first, which repeats or “doubles” itself, such as those images in which a picture appears within its own, larger version; the second, in which an image is nested within a different image; and the third, which is an image not necessarily framed within another but which provokes reflections on images in general. (This last observation can be applied to any pictorial representation.)<sup>32</sup> The *vita* image embraces all three types to magnificent effect, thereby proving its inherent capacity for visual critique.

Take the icon of St. Catherine, currently located at the eponymous Monastery of St. Catherine in the Sinai Peninsula of Egypt (Plate II). The center of the panel depicts a resplendently bejeweled, full-length portrait of the saint, her imperial dress periodically punctuated with pearls, which break its dark monotony. Catherine’s eyes are averted to the right and her mouth is primly set. She clutches a double-barred cross in one folded, grasping hand and blesses the viewer with the other in an open, relaxed gesture. In the scenes surrounding Catherine, her portrait recurs in modified scales and postures. In two scenes on the left grid, for instance, the portrait is laid horizontally and stripped of its clothing. While the scene at the top shows Catherine being beaten, her blood forming a mesh of scarlet streaks across her body, the one at the bottom further truncates her figure. Only her haloed head appears, jutting out grotesquely from the wheel on which she is set. These images belong to the second category posited by Mitchell, in which an image (Catherine’s portrait) is nested within another set of images (the narrative scenes). The point at stake is the abrupt transformation of the canonical icon of Catherine to reduced, starkly different avatars, each of which seems to be a valid visual expression of the saint.

Two scenes on the right grid adhere, if a tad obliquely, to Mitchell’s first category of metapictures. In these, Catherine’s full-length figure, quite similar to the portrait at the center, is pushed to the edge of the



panel. She stands at an angle, addressing the emperor and a crowd. The icon is repeated twice in succession, but in reduced scale. Because a larger figure always assumes greater importance in Byzantine icons, are we to read Catherine’s miniaturized form as lower in the hierarchy than its magnified counterpart at the center? And because a full, frontal figure was regarded as appropriate for the depiction of a holy being, are the martyrdom scenes, which necessarily fragment the icon, to be read as less important than the portrait? The assumptions underlying Byzantine imagery would subjugate the flanking scenes to the icon at the center, but this book refutes such a view, arguing instead that the *vita* icons reimagine established precepts precisely through the juxtaposition of a range of iconographic and ontological states.

If Mitchell’s categories of metapictures clarify the ways in which the *vita* images provoke reflections on representation in general, then the significance of the repeated icon of the saint is further elucidated by George Didi-Huberman’s meditations on visual signification.<sup>33</sup> In his study on Fra Angelico, Didi-Huberman, drawing on the work of the semiotician Charles Sanders Peirce, ponders the “extent to which we have a tendency when contemplating a painting to forget the distinction between the present sign and the absent reality.”<sup>34</sup> Didi-Huberman refers here to a constellation of red marks in a painted meadow in a scene of the *Noli Me Tangere* that appear to signify flowers but which, at a closer look, betray their iconic status as simply blotches of red paint. The “present sign” is made up of the blotches and the “absent reality” the flowers they seem to be. This leads Didi-Huberman to coin the term “equivocal representation,”<sup>35</sup> one that functions through a displacement of its iconic value. Interpreting the red blotches as Christ’s stigmata as much as they signify flowers, Didi-Huberman points to the “labile movement between signs of different semiotic status – icons, indexes, symbols” within a visual field and to the “associative thinking” that characterizes images, “a thinking that structures itself by shifting.”<sup>36</sup>

These thoughts may be productively applied to the *vita* images as well. Take the famous panel painting of St. Francis by Bonaventura Berlinghieri, currently in the Church of S. Francesco in Pescia, Italy (Plate III). Made in 1235, this is the first *vita* image of the saint. Francis is portrayed at the center of the panel, the stigmata prominently displayed on his hands and feet. The scenes flanking him include episodes

from his life and posthumous miracles. Among these, we see two depictions of Francis during his lifetime, two scenes in which he appears as a vision, and two scenes in which his portrait is absent but where he is depicted nonetheless as a miracle-working relic, buried beneath the altar. Of the latter, at least one – the cure of the girl with the twisted neck at the bottom left – is emphatic about Francis’s remains being the cause of the cure; the girl is shown lying right next to the wooden case in which his body was kept soon after Francis’s death.

In each of these scenes, the iconic value of the figure of Francis remains the same; it signifies the *alter Christus*. However, the “present sign,” comprising the figure in the brown habit with the marks on its hands and feet, which appears in four of the scenes, should not obscure the “absent reality” – the different states that the figure assumes in each episode, notwithstanding the general uniformity of its representation. Just as the *terra rossa* so acutely observed by Didi-Huberman in the *Noli Me Tangere* fresco “can function on the whole surface of the work as the privileged operator of displacements and structures of meaning,” simultaneously signifying Mary Magdalene’s sin, Christ’s stigmata, spring flowers, the Passion, and the Resurrection,<sup>37</sup> so too the tall, imposing portrait of Francis in the center of the Pescia panel is the index from which the movement between the states of human being, vision, and relic is effected on the flanks. The viewer is expected not only to see these separate stages in Francis’s life but also to appreciate the transformations and associations sustained by his saintly being in each of them and their calibration of holy presence. The eye roving from bottom to top and left to right across the image must be accompanied by a similarly shifting awareness of the flickering transitions in the sacred figure at different sites of the panel.

This quality of the *vita* format, I argue, made it a supple instrument for probing the relationships that structured visual representation and viewership in the late medieval period. One may well ask at this point *why* medieval viewers might have been required to think about such issues at all. What were the imperatives behind articulating and impressing the significance of the different ontological forms of the saint on their beholders? The answers to these questions, I suggest, lie in the fundamental importance of imagery to those very cultural practices that engaged the saint in all his or her complexity – even in as (seemingly)

simple a process such as viewing, performed by a layman. Mary Carruthers has asserted the primary role of images in the development of memorial techniques in the Middle Ages.<sup>38</sup> In his studies on mystical devotions, Jeffrey Hamburger has indicated the use of images by mystics, often, paradoxically, to ascend to an imageless state.<sup>39</sup> Michelle Karnes has put forward a similarly vital function for the pictorial discourse in the exercise of the medieval imagination; she argues that meditative practice drew upon carefully honed faculties of visualization, which were constantly improved upon and which acted directly upon the meditant’s imaginative prowess.<sup>40</sup> My argument proposes that practices such as meditation, memorization, commemoration, description, and viewing – the last in its most basic sense – were believed to gain in depth and richness not only because of the images incorporated into them but also because of the viewer’s or meditant’s ability to recognize the *kinds* of images their eyes took in. The gradations between these images were made most evident in the viewer’s cognitive and affective interaction with the saints. The body of Christ and its icons incited reflections on the conjunctions between the human sphere and the divine;<sup>41</sup> the Virgin and her icons provoked theories regarding the ways in which the divine could be circumscribed in a human medium;<sup>42</sup> the Eucharist urged intellectuals and laymen alike to ponder “the relation of phenomenal appearances to an inner reality.”<sup>43</sup> This book puts forward the medieval saint as an equally significant player in the arena of intellectual thought. He or she, apart from his or her individual powers, was a resilient tool to think with: a means of figuring out the intricate connections between signs and their referents, and the expression of the holy and its range of ontological states in matter such as wood, metal, and pigments.

Indeed, the contemporary concerns of the Byzantines and the Franciscans included all these issues and were disclosed most cogently in the medium of the *vita* panels. For Byzantium, these concerns centered on the reflections provoked by Iconoclasm (726–843 CE), which outlined the relations between the subject (or prototype) and its representation, holy presence and physical matter, word and image, and the relative merits of vision vis-à-vis the other senses.<sup>44</sup> These relationships were subjected to a rigorous reconceptualization by eleventh-century thinkers, thus laying the ground for a novel iconic format that would articulate the issues at hand. Charles Barber has shown how intellectuals and

theologians such as Michael Psellos and Symeon the New Theologian were deeply engaged in rethinking the bonds between a prototype and its representations.<sup>45</sup> In one of his writings, Symeon the New Theologian invokes the “memory image” in conjunction with an icon to summon a vision of the prototype, thus arraying visual expressions informed by varying degrees of presence in order to invoke the “real thing.”<sup>46</sup> Michael Psellos, on the other hand, proposes a close looking – a detailed formal analysis that absorbs the viewer – in order to detect the contours of the “un-representable” prototype within the icon. In fact, Psellos uses the term “living icon” as a means of bridging the gap between the image made by the artist’s hand, devoid of holy presence, and the holy subject, which no hand can adequately capture in any medium but which can, at certain moments, animate a manufactured image.<sup>47</sup> These are just two examples of the creative permutations on the icon-prototype relationship that were elaborated upon in the eleventh century, well after the foundations of that relationship had been pondered over in the ninth century, during Iconoclasm.

The concepts of representation and presence were debated in the medieval West with equal fervor. Thinkers from the Carolingian period up to the eleventh and twelfth centuries and beyond grappled with the relationships between form and matter, signs and referents, the extent to which man resembled God and the Eucharist resembled or contained the real presence of Christ, and the ways and means of visualizing the invisible.<sup>48</sup> The emergence of the cathedral schools in the Gothic age with their emphasis on “charismatic pedagogy” further reinforced and concretized the issue of real presence by concentrating it in the person of the teacher. As C. Stephen Jaeger puts it, if the eleventh century cherished presence (“real, full, vital, embodied”) and not representation, then the twelfth century cultivated a nostalgia for that lost presence and tried to capture its “fading charisma” through art, or symbolic representation.<sup>49</sup>

All these prior developments are reflected in the literature produced by the Franciscans. For them, the most pressing concern was the difficulty in depicting the perfect follower of Christ, whose imitative practice had revolutionized conceptions of the saintly body. Moreover, Francis guarded his most transcendent signs of sainthood – the stigmata – as a secret during his lifetime, thereby complicating a powerful strand of medieval thought that posited imitation as didactic spectacle.<sup>50</sup> In

textual accounts of the stigmatization (discussed in [Chapter 3](#)), there is a marked oscillation between the description of the stigmata as nails (*clavi*) and their qualification as wounds or marks (*puncturas clavorum*). Thus, the status of the stigmata as signifiers or the signified – as representations or real presence – is never clearly spelled out, signaling the difficulties that Francis’s biographers encountered in the depiction of the *alter Christus*. These difficulties are evident in the *vita* images of the saint produced after his death. Indeed, I argue that the *vita* format is harnessed by the Franciscans not only to depict Francis but also to communicate the problems that his unique brand of charisma posed for pictorial representation in general. An added complication was introduced by the papal statutes of the duecento, which insisted upon empirical evidence to define a holy person as a saint.<sup>51</sup> Consequently, the notion of the “eyewitness” and the status of sensory knowledge were roped into the string of legal, theological, and representational conundrums that the depiction of the *alter Christus* entailed. The conflicting imperatives of representing Francis’s stigmata in text and image and simultaneously signaling their secret nature compelled the Franciscan Order in the duecento to formulate an idiosyncratic model of visuality and artistic practice.

### Organizational Tactics

Between the eleventh and the thirteenth centuries, therefore, a section of thinkers in Byzantium and Italy was immersed (though not necessarily concurrently) in reflections intersecting over holy presence, imitation, and representation. The *vita* image ties these reflections together. As a discursive format drawing on period theories of sacred presence, it enabled Byzantine and Franciscan thinkers to enunciate, and to a certain extent resolve, their respective concerns. Although a strong scholarly literature exists on the vibrant artistic interactions between Byzantium and Italy, the *vita* panel occupies a decidedly marginal position in it.<sup>52</sup> The format is usually collapsed with other images implicated in the encounters between the two cultures; hence, its strength as a visual idiom is overlooked.

*The Living Icon in Byzantium and Italy* is the first book-length study of the format. It contributes to two important spheres of medieval studies:

namely, pictorial hagiography and Byzantine-Italian interactions via the Franciscan Order. Henry Maguire and Cynthia Hahn have explored the iconographic and narrative strategies used to depict particular saintly types, such as the warrior saint, virgins, and bishops, and the ways in which hagiographic narratives encompass multiple meanings.<sup>53</sup> Both Maguire and Hahn have shown, for Byzantium and the medieval West respectively, that the strategies of visual repetition and inter pictorial relations in hagiographic imagery enabled the viewer not only to connect a particular saint to a larger body of holy beings but also to differentiate between a specific saintly personality and his or her counterparts, no matter how similar they might be. This study builds on the work of Maguire and Hahn by situating the practice of depicting a saint in text and image within the broader preoccupations of medieval representation and as a means of challenging some, if not all, its premises. As a result, the book explores the difficult ties between the image and the subject, word and image, and image and relic that the saint, specifically, negotiates. It also argues that the principle of repetition in pictorial hagiography, in combination with inter pictoriality, enabled the viewer to detect the varying identities of the saint portrayed, not just in relation to other saintly personalities but also with regard to himself or herself over the course of a lifetime. Furthermore, this book expands on Nancy P. Ševčenko's seminal article on the *vita* icons,<sup>54</sup> their putative history, and iconographic insights by analyzing the rhetorical poetics of the format. Charles Barber's and Bissera V. Pentcheva's studies on medieval theories of visual presence also inform this exploration of the Byzantine *vita* icon.<sup>55</sup>

In the realm of Franciscan studies, this book expands on the scholarship of Anne Derbes, Chiara Frugoni, and William R. Cook et al. Derbes has emphasized the creativity of Italian artists of the duecento, particularly of Franciscan art, vis-à-vis their appropriation of Byzantine visual models.<sup>56</sup> The studies of Chiara Frugoni, William Cook, and others examine the rich iconographic details of the Franciscan *vita* panels, arguing for their propagandistic and didactic value in an era in which Francis, as a "new" saint, required widespread, careful publicity.<sup>57</sup> This book, in contrast, underscores the innovative *rhetorical* strategies of alternate concealment and revelation framing Franciscan textual and visual representation in the duecento. By shifting attention away from

strictly iconographic correspondences between the panels and their supposed Byzantine (and, later, Franciscan) precursors, or Franciscan texts, the book argues that the format went beyond mere propaganda. Instead, it was deeply implicated in meditations on the nature of the image, the workings of vision, and the practices of imitation and representation, all of which were subjects of some urgency in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. Most importantly, the book reveals the ways in which the icons refute the enduring assumption of naturalism – and, thereby, of complete viewer access and immersion – that is a leitmotif of the scholarship on Franciscan imagery in general.

In thus bringing together Byzantium and medieval Italy, this book considers each region and its textual and visual facets. The first chapter (“The Saint in the Text”) explores episodes of the production and reception of saints’ icons in six hagiographic texts from tenth- and eleventh-century Byzantium. It contends that they reveal a sophisticated conceptual engagement with subjects already rehearsed two centuries ago, during and in the aftermath of Iconoclasm, and which remained matters of debate in the eleventh century. The thematic and semantic differences in each text, and the nuances of the visual vocabulary evident in terms such as *morphe* (form), *emphereia* (form or figure), and *eikon* (image), signify differing sets of bonds between the saint in question and his or her representation in the text. By drawing on Byzantine reading practices, the chapter posits that the reader of these hagiographies encounters – and is urged to register – the differing degrees of holy presence that animate the narratives; indeed, a range of such encounters is often orchestrated within a single, extended episode. In the process, the hagiographies evince the inventive energy with which the figure of the saint – the “living icon” – was used to interrogate established models of visibility.

If the eleventh century witnesses a lively discourse on representation centered on the saint’s icon, then the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries in Byzantium are simultaneously more fraught and innovative. On the one hand, the number of hagiographic texts declines sharply; instead, the figure of the saint appears in letters and commentaries as a mode of critiquing the most vulnerable points in mimetic practice. On the other hand, there is a marked interest in exploring holy presence and absence in pictorial modes, such as on the enigmatic templon beam depicting the miracles of St. Eustratios mentioned earlier. These interests are already

implicit in illustrated manuscripts of saints' lives from the latter half of the eleventh century but are given full expression in panel paintings from the twelfth. The second chapter ("The Saint in the Image") discusses the deliberately reflexive dimensions of saints' icons in the eleventh and twelfth centuries in Byzantium, revealing the modes in which they invite a viewer to detect differing levels of holy presence in their composition. Although the means whereby the images communicate these differences necessarily diverge from the texts explored in [Chapter 1](#), my argument suggests that the two still work together; both the texts and the images engage a shared set of problems, each within the parameters of its own medium. Examining a range of depictions from manuscripts to panel paintings, [Chapter 2](#) closes with the detailed analysis of four *vita* icons. It contends that the format was conceived as an essay that delineated the bonds linking the separate, but often competing, categories of relics, icons, dreams, and apparitions to their prototypes.

The next two chapters explore significant episodes in a century in the life of the Franciscan Order. St. Francis's stigmatization exerted a unique set of pressures on those charged with depicting the saint's life. The third chapter ("Wrought by the Finger of God") interprets Franciscan hagiographic practice of the duecento as one that incorporated two potentially discordant aims: the delineation of the literal dimensions of mimesis engaged by Francis; and adherence to the contemporary legal standards of sanctity enjoined by the papacy. As the bearer of the stigmata, Francis was endowed with a human body that was simultaneously the site of intersection and collision of a host of legal and literary challenges. The biographies produced by the Franciscan Order met the varied demands Francis's body posed through a textual realism that paradoxically strove to undercut its own descriptive powers. This is evident even in that most rational and clear account of Francis's life by Bonaventure – the *Major Legend* (*Legenda Maior*) – which became the official hagiography of the *alter Christus* from the 1260s onward. By questioning the viability of representing a secret phenomenon such as the stigmatization, these texts imaginatively engage with the contested notions in the thirteenth century regarding visual attestation, witness, and depiction. A close reading, therefore, is essential in order to tease out the ways in which these texts depict Francis and also retreat from the empirical stakes intrinsic to that enterprise.



One of the earliest surviving panel paintings of Francis is in the *vita* format, with motifs explicitly derived from its Byzantine counterparts. This panel was followed by a series of *vita* images of Francis in the duecento, which have been read primarily as didactic documents intended to spread the saint’s fame. As a corollary, scholarship has also emphasized their compositional clarity – a sign of the nascent classicism of the era that culminated in the ingenious spatial illusionism of the images by Giotto and Duccio at the end of the century.<sup>58</sup> The fourth chapter (“Depicting Francis’s Secret”) performs a close reading of four Franciscan panels to show that their “clarity” is tempered to enable the beholder access at certain points while denying it at others. This is a decidedly different interpretation from that which scholarship has endorsed so far. The dominant reading of Franciscan imagery supposes the viewer’s seamless and immersive participation in it. This is due to a persistent scholarly tradition that attributes a powerful affective tenor to the goals informing the Franciscan agenda: the conversion of heretics, the inciting of compassion, and encouraging the laity to generate vivid narratives from the verbal and visual exemplars proffered by the friars.<sup>59</sup> Only recently have these features been modified. Sarah McNamer’s work, for instance, has questioned the unidimensional affective and participatory strain that scholars routinely read into Franciscan texts such as the *Meditationes Vitae Christi*.<sup>60</sup> As far as the pictorial output commissioned by the *Frati Minori* is concerned, however, there is still a remarkable readiness to view it, even in its earliest manifestations, as deliberately naturalistic and foreshadowing the illusionistic virtuosity of the late duecento. I suggest instead that the “classical” lucidity of the Franciscan *vita* panels is construed as a mode of intermittent revelation; one that seeks to disrupt participation and to urge an awareness of the complex configuration of Francis’s image. Instead of allowing the viewer direct access to the saint and the events of his life, the *vita* panels truncate the viewing process, thus reflecting the varying degrees of visual and tactile access that Francis himself permitted the public during his lifetime. In the process, the panels reveal the Franciscan Order’s thoughtful restructuring of an (ostensibly) illusionistic mode to suit the exceptional representational demands posed by its founder.

### Broader Horizons

In examining these issues, this book attempts to revise some of the prevailing tenets on Byzantine image theory, saints, and cross-cultural relations in the medieval era. First, it argues that the major issues regarding representation and viewing remained contentious in Byzantium well after the Iconoclastic controversy had ended. The emphatic restoration of icons in 843 CE did not by any means resolve the nature of the image, the role of the artist, the functions of vision, or the possibilities of mediating holy presence via visual representation. There is a general readiness among Byzantine art historians to take the existence and the role of the icon for granted after its restoration, but this is not self-evident from the textual and visual corpus. If anything, I would argue that the acceptance of the icon as an integral part of Orthodoxy (re)opened – even multiplied – the arenas of debate it had already provoked in the eighth and ninth centuries. The icon triumphed, but it brought in its wake a tangled web of concepts and practices that, even if sanctioned, did not prevent renewed reflection and disputes on them. If we accept the *longue durée* account of Iconoclasm as posited by Jaś Elsner, with roots reaching back into the ancient world, we detect similar patterns of iconophilia alternating with iconophobia beyond the ninth century as well.<sup>61</sup> By “iconophobia” I refer to a profound interrogation of the definition of an icon and attempts to control and regulate that still enigmatic and troubling object. These tendencies are evident in the writings of intellectuals, clergymen, and philosophers in the eleventh century. The fact that certain individuals subjected the icon to such ruminations reveals an unease – or, at the very least, a concern – with understanding and harnessing its potential as both an ontological and epistemological tool.<sup>62</sup> Symeon the New Theologian, for instance, displays an intriguingly ambiguous attitude toward holy icons whereby – one might easily argue – they become utterly redundant once they have served their epistemological function as signposts to the divine. Leo of Chalcedon, on the other hand, collapses the ontological and epistemological dimensions, positing the icon as one that both contains and permits knowledge of holy presence.<sup>63</sup>

While these individual attitudes have been meticulously explored by Charles Barber,<sup>64</sup> this book argues that it is in the genre of textual and

visual hagiography that we detect the continuation of similar themes, often in astonishingly creative (and even convoluted) modes. The obligatory references to saints’ images in hagiographic texts are not perfunctory genuflections to the victory of the icon. Rather, if read carefully, each episode involving the manufacture and display of those objects reveals a wealth of conflicting attitudes toward imagery, image making, and viewing. In this respect, hagiography takes over from theology, presenting the same issues in the framework of fresh, provocative, often unpredictable narratives. This shift, and the attendant role of hagiography, is not to be underestimated. The popularity and accessibility of the genre, in both text and image, would have ensured that subjects which hitherto circulated primarily in elite aristocratic or monastic echelons were now diffused among the general public. The conversation, or discourse, on representation thus continued; indeed, it was deliberately unleashed into a broader sphere where the issues in question might arguably have been interpreted and practiced in diverse, perhaps even unorthodox, ways. Certainly, the hagiographic texts explored in the [next chapter](#) attest to such a diversity, and a willingness to reimagine the debates instigated during Iconoclasm in innovative modes, from unexpected angles. It is within the contours of this climate of a renewed questioning of the icon that the *vita* image takes its place. The notion of a hieratic visual culture hemmed in by a set of restrictive conditions (reinforced by the triumph of Orthodoxy in 843) is belied when we consider the truly radical possibilities inherent in hagiography and its reach.

Yet another assumption that this book attempts to revise lies in the nature of the artistic relations between the Byzantine East and the Latin West; in this case, Italy in the thirteenth century. A wealth of literature exists on the movement, replication, adaptation, and sometimes, the deliberate marginalization of Byzantine images in the West. The most influential studies have concentrated on icons of the Virgin and Christ’s Passion, both of which supposedly furnished the foundations enabling the transition from the *maniera greca* to the *dolce stil nuovo*.<sup>65</sup> But while the forms and iconographies of the images in question have been well explored, their potential for a critique of *issues of representation*, is less, if at all, studied. Anne Derbes’s subtle reading of the transformation of Byzantine images of Christ’s Passion by Italian artists attributes agency and intentionality to

the latter.<sup>66</sup> While Derbes concentrates on the iconographic alterations effected by duecento artists, the reasons behind those changes must also have been driven by consideration of such larger philosophical questions as the pictorial negotiation of Christ's human and divine natures – a burning topic for the medieval era, and one that explicitly demands a reconsideration of the relationship of the sacred to the material. In short, the *raison d'être* for the reworking of Byzantine imagery must have been informed, to a certain extent, by the debates on holy presence, its material manifestations, and its ramifications that had occupied the Latins for centuries no less than their Orthodox counterparts, and which were equally imbricated in the realms of artistic production and reception. The engagement of the Franciscans with these issues is critical because of the implications of Francis's particular form of imitative practice on visual culture and, importantly, because of the kinship between Franciscan principles and Byzantine theology.<sup>67</sup> This kinship was evident in artistic enterprises; Amy Neff, for instance, has argued for the incorporation of Byzantine tenets of spirituality in the architectural and painted spaces of the Franciscan Order.<sup>68</sup> Clearly, then, Byzantium furnished more than simply a store of images – forms and iconographies – for the Italians to draw from. And equally important, the attraction of the images did not reside solely in their material value: their perceived antiquity, their provenance from or proximity to the Holy Land, or their status as booty.<sup>69</sup>

If Byzantine images were needed by the Italians to fulfill specific needs, then part of those needs must have been tied to the issues of representation that icons engaged in all their complexity, some of which were vitally relevant to the visual culture of the peninsula. This is evident in the ways in which the rich semiotic content of Byzantine icons of the Theotokos and Christ are transposed to a specifically Italian – Siennese, for instance – political and poetic language.<sup>70</sup> It is precisely because Francis of Assisi stretched the norms undergirding textual and visual representation to their limits that the Franciscan Order was forced to seek novel modes of navigating those norms. The Byzantine *vita* icon was a viable image type for the Order, not only because it enabled the display of the life of the *alter Christus*, or because it enfolded him into a venerated lineage of holy persons and images from the Byzantine East. It was also a format that allowed for the fullest expression of the radical physical nature of Francis: the combination of a normative saintly body before the

stigmatization, with one that flouted those norms with a vengeance after the event. It is this before-and-after phenomenon that the *vita* panels of Francis are so intent on capturing (as we shall see in [Chapter 4](#)), one that signaled a “before” and “after” for the very definition of sanctity with all its attendant – and deeply problematic – shifts in terms of vision, witness, ontology, and representation. The *vita* image thus signals a set of important concerns shared by the Byzantines and the Franciscans, which are tied to specific aspects of the visual discourses of those cultures.

Last but not least, this book attempts an intervention in the field of hagiography, and the broader assumptions underpinning medieval images of saints and their lives. The latter have by and large invited two interpretative models. One posits pictorial hagiography as a tool of spiritual instruction. The other is but a take on the same theme, positing an immediate ideological program for the images, such as social or political commentary pertaining to their historical moment. While hagiography in any medium undoubtedly performed these functions, the problem with the approaches is their assumption that images, specifically, were always transparent enough to project their agendas. “The Lives of saints are made to be both affective and effective,” in the words of Cynthia Hahn – “but little else.”<sup>71</sup> This claim aligns with the importance accorded to communication in medieval art, particularly in the domain of hagiographic imagery. Wolfgang Kemp notes that “in late antique and medieval art, communication is not so much communicated as taken as a theme: the viewer is meant to learn more about the possibilities of communication between God and human beings, and about the conditions that govern access to communicative situations.”<sup>72</sup> The possibility that the images of saints might deliberately rein in their capacities of communication and revelation in order to proffer meditations on their own status as images – as visual signs referring to prototypes who, by definition, were themselves regarded as signs of Christ’s grace and divinity – is largely discounted. Such interpretations, no matter how erudite, are still undergirded by the Gregorian dictum that “images are the books of the illiterate,” instructing the populace on the most salient points of the messages they seek to convey.<sup>73</sup>

This brings us back to Didi-Huberman’s work and his critique of an art-historical practice dominated by the “tradition of the didacticism of images”; it is a didacticism, moreover, that often leads to a corresponding

“*simplism* . . . : it postulates that images are simplified, easily understood illustrations of texts that are less simple and less accessible to the ‘people.’”<sup>74</sup> The sheer popularity of hagiographic literature in the medieval period has, I believe, sometimes seduced art historians into following the path of Didi-Huberman’s “simplism,” taking the images at face value, matching them to an overriding context which is (according to the readings) more or less blatantly or covertly communicated on the surface of the picture, and more easily understood than its textual source. And yet surely an image, like a text, is bound to harbor ambiguities and a multiplicity of meanings. When St. Gregory declared images to be “books,” surely he was making an analogy (like his Byzantine counterpart, St. Basil) that is less apparent than it seems. Even as he suggested that images were more accessible to the illiterate, Gregory could not have been unaware of the import of “books”; after all, the medieval attitude to them was far from simple. Manuscripts, especially illustrated ones, were expensive objects not only demanding elaborate processes of production but also eliciting a range of reading and viewing practices. Thus, Gregory’s dictum, in likening images to books, might in fact support the notion of images – and images of saints – as artifacts with a similarly complex matrix of underlying structures and responses. The strategies whereby the notions of author and reader, mental *ascesis* and bodily performance, orality and textuality, and the center and margins are productively blurred (or fortified) have been explored in the arena of textual hagiography.<sup>75</sup> The fact that its pictorial version still awaits an equally thorough intervention only proves the dominance of the text in the academy, despite the much-vaunted “pictorial turn.”

The protagonists of this book reflect the potential of hagiographic images to interrogate the issues of production and viewership, repetition and defacement, word and image, and concealment and revelation. The *vita* icons, in particular, masterfully implicate the viewer in a rhythmic flow of forms that may or may not signify the holy being in each iteration. Through their bold juxtaposition of the center and the frame, the imposing, hieratic portrait of a saint and its miniaturized, mobilized version, these icons prompt a viewer to decipher the differing values and statuses accorded to each depiction of the holy one. As a result, they enjoin an acute consciousness of the flexibility of the bonds believed to tie the image to its prototype, and the ability of an image to

capture each of the distinct identities assumed by a saint over his or her lifetime and beyond. Just as St. Basil (in the letter quoted at the beginning of this chapter) advocated picking and choosing those qualities of the saints that the viewer or reader felt were missing in his own character, so too this book attempts to fill a gap in the study of hagiography by positing the saint as a dynamic mechanism of critique – a figure whose intrinsic ontological nuances made it a near-perfect instrument for the reformulation of representational concepts and practices at the cusp of the late medieval and early modern eras.

## CHAPTER ONE

### THE SAINT IN THE TEXT

#### Notes on a Trial

One night in the year 1008 in Constantinople, an icon was put on trial. Removed from its residence at the Monastery of St. Mamas by a group of monks, it was then borne all the way to the Patriarchal Palace. This nocturnal procession was different from those the city usually witnessed, when sacred icons and relics accompanied by censers, gaping crowds, and the prayers of the faithful wound their way solemnly to their final destination. In this case, the bearers of the icon were monks who had rebelled against their monastic superior; the icon, that of a man whose status as a saint was in dispute.

The man depicted on the icon, Symeon Eulabes, was the spiritual mentor of Symeon the New Theologian. The New Theologian had fostered a cult around Eulabes that was challenged by the powerful Patriarchate; so we are told by the *Vita* of the New Theologian, scripted in the eleventh century by Niketas Stethatos.<sup>1</sup> Part of Stethatos's aim in writing the *Vita* was to restore the spiritual reputation of the New Theologian, who, as his epithet implies, was a controversial figure to Byzantine orthodoxy. In the process, Stethatos expends his considerable skills of argumentation in constructing a case for and against an *icon* of a would-be saint. This object assumes a role as important as the main characters taking part in the trial and is judged separately from the person of Eulabes as an entity in its own right.<sup>2</sup>

According to Stethatos, the icon was viewed in the company of other holy icons.<sup>3</sup> The verdict sparked a sharp division. Some of the monks



believed that the icon of Eulabes did indeed represent a saint worthy of inclusion in the holy community, whereas others protested to the contrary. Although Stethatos is tantalizingly reticent about the precise mechanisms of the trial, such as the criteria applied by the monks in their evaluation of the icon and the reasons why their judgments differed, he still offers clues of some significance to the careful reader.

For one, the account yields the insight that the rules of representation and viewing were remarkably flexible; where some monks claimed to have seen the portrait of a legitimate saint, others saw something else. Furthermore, the method of positioning Eulabes' icon in relation to other holy icons suggests that the jury was attempting, in specific ways, to detect the mimetic relationships between them. Again, we are not told whether these mimetic bonds hinged on the iconographic similarities between the icons, but one incident that occurred during the trial sheds some light on the matter. At a certain point, Symeon the New Theologian asserted that the features of Eulabes were transformed into the features of Christ through the presence of the Holy Spirit in the icon.<sup>4</sup> The New Theologian then continued by referring to the icon of Eulabes *as* the icon of Christ, thus implying that the two icons were interchangeable. However, Stephen of Nicomedia – the New Theologian's most formidable adversary in the trial – clearly perceived no such resemblance. Stephen reacted by effacing the word *hagios* (holy) inscribed on the icon depicting Eulabes. This act may be read as an emphatic denial of any sort of mimetic relationship between the icon and its holy counterparts. By removing the word *hagios*, the identity of Eulabes' icon was perceived to have changed from that of a holy being to that of a mere man, as argued by Charles Barber.<sup>5</sup>

The final outcome of the trial was harsh, resulting in the destruction of all extant icons of Symeon Eulabes and exile for the New Theologian.<sup>6</sup> Despite one's suspicions that this verdict was foreordained, the terms in which the trial struggled to define a holy icon are profoundly significant. The act of judging the image of Eulabes was ultimately an exercise in attempting to relate the representation on the icon with other, validated representations, which, in turn, were believed to relate convincingly to their original subjects, or prototypes. The procedures in the Patriarchal Palace imply that these mimetic bonds were expressed in terms of a broader set of concerns integral to Byzantine viewership as it was shaped

after Iconoclasm (726–843). In short, in locating the similarities (and differences) between the icon of Eulabes and other holy icons, the monks were grappling with the fraught relations between an image and its prototype, holy presence and its lack, and word and image. Where Symeon the New Theologian (and those in his “camp,” so to speak) located holy presence in the very site of the icon, Stephen of Nicomedia (and his camp) took the opposite view. That night in 1008 the portrait icon of Eulabes, a would-be saint, became a site of debate pertaining to the most urgent preoccupations of Byzantine visuality as they had already been rehearsed two centuries ago. And, importantly, this debate was played out in a *hagiographic* text describing the life of the New Theologian.

The trial serves as a fitting emblem for this chapter, which explores the literary discourse that developed around the icons of saints in the late tenth and eleventh centuries in Byzantium. The chapter argues that, quite apart from the roles of protection and intercession, the saint’s image acquired an implicit discursive value in this period. Simply put, the portrait icon of a saint was construed as a tool that articulated and tested fundamental concerns regarding representation. These concerns encompassed the relations between sight and hearing, the role of the artist and the viewer, and, not least, the icon’s mimetic relationship to its prototype (*prototypos*) or original and to other devotional images and objects. All these issues had sparked impassioned debates during the years of Iconoclasm.<sup>7</sup> Far from having been resolved with the triumph of the iconophiles in 843, they remained vibrant arenas of philosophical and theological reflection well into the eleventh century.

Charles Barber has explored the work of luminaries such as Michael Psellos, Symeon the New Theologian, Leo of Chalcedon, and others who were deeply engaged in working out variations on existing theories of the icon-prototype relationship.<sup>8</sup> My claim is that the contemporary hagiographic evidence, little considered in this context, enriches the scope of those ruminations. Robin Cormack, Henry Maguire, and Alexander Kazhdan have traced the mention of icons in various hagiographic texts and examined their role in Byzantine society.<sup>9</sup> This study interprets the hagiographic contexts of the icons as a deliberate strategy to engage with the prevailing principles of representation in provocative ways. The narratives reveal not just details regarding the production and

consumption of icons but also a conceptual engagement that often pushes the reflections prompted during and after Iconoclasm to their limits. I should mention that the terms employed in these reflections were not universally applied, nor were they understood uniformly (the example of Leo of Chalcedon as discussed in the Introduction is a case in point).<sup>10</sup> However, the rich corpus of writings bequeathed by the most eminent iconophiles forms the point of departure for subsequent contemplation in the hagiographies. Where the theories penned by Michael Psellos and others were almost certainly restricted to the educated elite, the wide reach of hagiographic texts must have opened up issues of visual representation to a broader Byzantine audience – one that was habituated to reading and listening to these texts in church or at home.

Except for a few uncharacteristic hiatuses, hagiography was the dominant literary genre in Byzantium.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, it is an immensely fruitful source for unveiling perceptions about representation and how the links between an icon and its prototype were imagined. When one considers the fact that very few of the iconophile saints described in hagiography received any actual cultic veneration, the potential of this genre as a *discursive* arena becomes apparent.<sup>12</sup> Ninth-century texts, such as the *Life of Patriarch Nikephoros*, include lengthy episodes of debate between the saint (nearly always an iconophile) and his iconoclastic interlocutor in which each side proceeds to enumerate his arguments.<sup>13</sup> Tenth- and eleventh-century hagiography continues to engage creatively with similar concerns, if not in such a directly confrontational mode.

In all the narratives I explore, the anxieties of visualization are most effectively encoded in those episodes when an artist prepares to make the saint's icon. To be sure, this is a trope we find in hagiographies even before Iconoclasm.<sup>14</sup> But I contend that after that upheaval, the trope was mobilized to enunciate, even challenge, the perceptions undergirding visual representation. The icon after Iconoclasm was posited as a “directed absence” – a representation that does not share in the substance of the prototype but leads the viewer *toward* it.<sup>15</sup> The icon functioned much as a signpost does, signifying the prototype by means of visual similitude, but not assuming any essential identity with the latter, according to the treatises of iconophiles such as Patriarch Nikephoros and Theodore of Stoudios. However, the portrait icon in the hagiographies I discuss becomes the site of ontological conflict over presence. By

complicating the notion of presence, these episodes also nuance the theoretical definition of the icon. Where the relationship between the icon and its prototype is imagined to be relatively stable, the hagiographies defy this norm, revealing the icon-prototype bond to be a complex, discontinuous, and highly contingent phenomenon.<sup>16</sup>

The episodes on portraiture communicate these issues in two modes. First, they present the icon and yet another material expression of holiness – the relic – as contiguous, sometimes congruent, and even competing sites of sacred presence. In fact, one could speculate that it was precisely the victory of the icon after Iconoclasm that led to a simultaneous reevaluation of the relic's powers and limits vis-à-vis the image.<sup>17</sup> It is my contention that the episodes under discussion in this chapter reflect this trend. Second, they also alert us to the critical fact that we arrive at the saint's portrait only by way of a range of terms such as *morphe*, *character*, and *eikon*, each of which is presented as a closely related but distinct visual expression. Bissera V. Pentcheva's exploration of key representational terms during Iconoclasm illuminates the range of connotations inherent in them.<sup>18</sup> My study bears out some of Pentcheva's readings in the hagiographic context; however, they are used here not in a prescriptive but in an interrogative, and sometimes even subversive, sense. Each term orchestrates the saint's presence and the nature of the image in distinct ways over the course of the narrative. The final product – the *eikon* – becomes a site where conflicting tenets of representation and perception collide, much like the trial that opens this chapter.

It is, of course, impossible to include here every relevant example of hagiography from the tenth and eleventh centuries. But the few that I have selected for discussion are both well known and understudied in terms of their reflection on the different models of visuality the Byzantines availed themselves of. These texts reveal the intellectual energy with which hagiography deployed the figure of the saint, making it the crucible for reformulating the relationships structuring visual experience in Byzantium.

### Definitions and Reading Practices

When in the ninth century Patriarch Nikephoros designated the icon as tending toward what (*pros ti*) it depicted, a sign of the prototype and not

the prototype itself, he was amending the definition of his great iconophile counterpart from the eighth century, St. John of Damascus.<sup>19</sup> John had posited an essentialist relation between the icon and the prototype, asserting that an icon, like a relic, participated in the substance of the holy person it depicted. The near-idolatrous tenor of this mimetic bond was modified by Nikephoros, who argued that an icon sustained a formalist relationship to its prototype. The icon resembled the latter but did not contain its essence.

These abstract philosophical definitions are given concrete shape, elaborated upon, and even undermined in hagiographic sources from the late tenth and eleventh centuries. The importance of performing a contextual reading of these narratives is at least twofold. First, they illuminate the role of a particular player who usually gets short shrift: the artist.<sup>20</sup> He remains nameless in almost every account, but he escapes the archetypal notion of the anonymous medieval “craftsman” because of the pressures the narrative places on him. It is he who is privileged with direct access to the saint, in contrast to the other characters. Moreover, the artist enables an instructive glimpse into the processes of representation, the role of the patron, and the shifting status of the image before it acquires its final shape. The artist’s activities and ostensible success or failure complicate the agency that post-Iconoclastic theories of representation bestowed on him.<sup>21</sup>

Second, a sequential appraisal of the narratives reveals the varied ways in which the saint was believed to relate to his image, verbal or visual. Indeed, the sequences are so organized as to illustrate this range. Because hagiography engaged the art of rhetoric, it is equally important to explore the rhetorical categories embedded in, or alluded to by, the episodes in question. Derek Krueger has discussed the ways in which literary production – right from the act of putting quill to parchment, to the use of rhetorical formulae, to the spatial organization of a hagiographic narrative – impinged on the representation of the saint, and the writer and reader of the text.<sup>22</sup> Henry Maguire has shown how images, in turn, incorporated rhetorical structures in their composition and arrangement, underscoring the reciprocity of the two representational modes.<sup>23</sup> In our examples, word and image are inextricably intertwined. By dint of their medium, the texts engage in an implicit debate on the viability of words versus images in capturing holy presence.

The very practices of reading in Byzantium encouraged a high degree of participation by the reader or listener.<sup>24</sup> Monastic reading in particular (and certainly a number of saints' lives were destined to be read in a monastic setting) emphasized the consumption of sacred texts as the first step toward pious action and contemplation. From the ninth century onward, hagiographies, lively examples of narrative action to start with, began to include ever more graphic descriptions of the trials and travails suffered by their protagonists to sustain the intensity of readerly participation.<sup>25</sup> The ideal reader was flexible and engaged enough to be able to switch from one emotional state to another in tune with the flux and flow of the narrative. Even if a reader were ultimately incapable of bridging the gulf between his or her own state of being and that of the holy protagonist, empathy was the key to enabling a degree of proximity between them. By imaginatively enduring the heat of the flames that burn the holy one or, alternately, shivering with the chills of icier tortures, the reader was vicariously assuming aspects of the physical and mental condition of the saint himself, thus performing an imitation of the holy being.<sup>26</sup> When considered in this light, the episodes on the making of saints' portraits are peculiarly suggestive as they encourage the reader to participate in the process of visualizing the saint. As the reader goes through the (often labyrinthine) course of production and reception described in the text, he necessarily (and ideally) sees, and distinguishes between, the identities that the saint's icon assumes at each stage.

Each episode I explore shares certain themes with the others, but not a single one is a direct replication of another. This alone is testimony to the wealth of perceptions informing visual practice and response in Byzantine culture. In the *Life of Nikon* and the *Life of Irene of Chrysobalanton*, the episodes I discuss are but a few among many about the powers and limits of the icon.<sup>27</sup> The other sources I examine transmit their concerns in extended sections.

### Icon and Relic

One such section occurs in the *Life of Theodora of Thessalonike*.<sup>28</sup> Composed at the very end of the ninth century, this *Life* distills the concerns that haunt hagiographic writings from the tenth and eleventh

centuries and so is an apt starting point for our inquiry. The text was written with a pro-iconophile slant. Yet it inverts iconophile principles, thus revealing itself as something more than a straightforward endorsement of them.

The episode in question begins by claiming that some time after Theodora's death, God deemed it appropriate that an icon be fashioned of the saint so that she might be "venerated in a relative manner" (καὶ τὴν ταύτης εἰκόνα εἶσω τῶν ἱερῶν περιβόλων ἱεροπρεπῶς ἀναστηλωθῆναι, ὡς ἂν σχετικῶς τὸν ἔριχνε κάτω). Right at the outset, the passage sets up the icon not as a sign of Theodora's presence but as an object requiring "relative veneration," a phrase used in iconophile tracts for the justification of icons.<sup>29</sup> Consequently, it alerts the reader to the differing degrees of presence that animate the devotional expressions of Theodora, each of which must be venerated on a scale in accordance with the others. Also, it signals the fact that each devotional object – icon and relic, in this case, as we shall see – sustains a distinct relationship to the person of Theodora. Her remains, the narrative tells us, were preserved in a chapel in the church of St. Stephen. The tale sets up an opposition between direct and indirect vision, and a contest between relic and icon as distinct sites of presence.

An artist named John who had never seen Theodora in the flesh, or her convent, dreamed that he was lying in the narthex of that building. In the right-hand colonnade where there was a chapel with Theodora's remains, John saw a hanging lamp from which oil was gushing out into a vessel below. This was the miraculous fluid that poured out of Theodora's body and possessed healing powers, but John was unaware of the fact. (It is interesting to note here that the relic in question is secondary, and not the primary relic that is Theodora's body. Along with an interrogation of the ontological status of the icon, this episode might also proffer an interrogation of the relative powers of different categories of relics.) The next morning John, together with an acquaintance, paid a visit to the church of St. Stephen so that they could set up an icon of Stephen. On entering the church, John realized that the structure was the same as the one he had seen in his dream complete with the lamp and the vessel, with a small but critical omission: the lamp was not gushing forth oil.

The narrative positions John such that he is removed from direct contact with Theodora's presence at each stage. In his dream he is offered a glimpse of holy presence in the form of the gushing oil, the significance

of which he is oblivious to. Sight, which was established as the highest sense after Iconoclasm,<sup>30</sup> in this case does not precipitate consciousness of sanctity. Furthermore, John is construed as a viewer whose dream vision corresponds to waking, conscious vision in every detail *except* the one that mattered. Compounding the point is the next stage of the story. A nun enlightened John and his companion as to why a vessel was placed beneath the lamp, but the two men remained unconvinced since they had not seen the miracle of the gushing oil with their own eyes. As the narrative states, “For sensible people always believe what they see and touch more than what they hear”<sup>31</sup> (Παρέπεται γὰρ αἰεὶ τοῖς ἐχέφροσιν ὄψει μᾶλλον καὶ ἀφ᾽ ἧ πιστεύειν ἢ ἀκοῇ).

This is a resounding affirmation of the superiority of sight over hearing as was decreed following Iconoclasm, and of sight as a sense encompassing touch. Although competing theories of vision prevailed in Byzantium, it was extramission that seems to have been implicitly invoked in iconophile texts.<sup>32</sup> According to extramission, the viewer’s eye sent out rays to the object under perception. The rays touched the object and returned to the viewer, imprinting the form of the object in his mind and memory. An essential aspect of extramission was its tactile component, which made vision active and continuous and forged a satisfyingly direct connection between viewer and object.<sup>33</sup> What is curious in our story, however, is that this tenet is introduced to underscore the opposite of what it is supposed to signal. Sight, for John and his companion, functions in order to alert them to something that is not there and that is emphatically the opposite of holy presence. They apprehend the latter through the (ostensibly) lesser sense, hearing, which does not satisfy or convince.

That night, and on the next, John dreamed that he was painting an icon of a woman he had never before seen, and yet he had the impression that it was the portrait of the woman whose shrine he had visited. Once again, sight, the sense par excellence, does not enable understanding or knowledge of the holy; in John’s case, it is merely instrumental, a faculty that he uses in near-complete ignorance of its import. On waking on the third day, John made an icon of Theodora without knowing any details as to her stature, her complexion, or her facial features. Despite this, the portrait he made was deemed an accurate representation of the saint when she was young.



The dream sequence is a recurring trope in sections dealing with the production of icons in post-Iconoclastic hagiographies. I argue that there are good reasons for this. The dream complicates the ontological conundrums peppering these episodes. It leads the reader to the heart of the problem: Is the figure in the dream the prototype herself, or yet another visual expression of the saint, such as her icon or her relic?

Niketas Stethatos drew distinctions between dreams, visions, and revelations, deeming dreams to belong to the lowest category – images from which the dreamer had nothing to gain – whereas visions and revelations formed a higher order of perception.<sup>34</sup> Even in the so-called secular sphere, dreams were regarded as a touchstone for debating the ontological status of those who appeared in them. The twelfth-century Byzantine novels recount elaborate dreams in which the ontological identities of the characters are pondered and which occur at crucial nodes in the narratives.<sup>35</sup> This trend, I suggest, develops from the themes already informing the genre of hagiography in the tenth and eleventh centuries. The importance of the dream sequence needs to be recognized as part of the overall concern in this period with the prototype-icon relationship and with the range of forms it could accommodate (such as visions and apparitions).

In Byzantine oneiromancy, dreams of the divine occurring in the states between sleep and wakefulness were considered to rank highest in dream classifications.<sup>36</sup> According to the *Oneirocriticon* of Achmet, if one dreamed of making an icon, then the dreamer's chances of future success depended on the accuracy of the icon made.<sup>37</sup> These rules do not obtain in the case of the *Life of Theodora* because the episode does not clarify the artist's state (was he on the verge of wakefulness or immersed in sleep?) when he had the dream. Nor does the artist actually see the finished icon. What he sees is an incomplete image in the process of being made. This dream, repeated for three nights, is remarkable for not having furnished an appearance of the saint in any form at all. It is devoid not only of the prototype herself, but also of her icon.

This is a radical omission because the statutes of the Second Council of Nicaea specifically formulated the artist as one who came *after* the work of art.<sup>38</sup> The artist did not create icons in a vacuum; he fashioned them in accordance with a prior reference point, either verbal or visual. The famous Byzantine painter's manual by Dionysios of Fournna reveals

the pervasiveness of the practice of verbal description by listing in painstaking detail the characteristics of each saint in the Orthodox calendar.<sup>39</sup> Although dated to the eighteenth century, it is believed to preserve the kernel of what was probably standard Byzantine procedure. This verbal codification of the saints might, in turn, have been prompted by the meticulous pictorial codes that were fixed for each holy being according to his or her status, as shown by Henry Maguire.<sup>40</sup> In this scheme, each saint was visually differentiated from his or her counterparts by means of dress, facial features, and posture. Military saints such as George were depicted as more robust than ascetic saints such as John the Baptist, who were, in contrast, depicted as emaciated. The pictorial codes were fixed by the late tenth and the eleventh centuries and must have furnished the basis on which verbal descriptions of the saints were crafted in manuals such as the one by Dionysios of Fourna.

The fact that the artist, John, makes an icon of Theodora without reference to a prior image of the saint, or her vision, or a verbal description, serves to disrupt – or at the very least blur – the varieties of mimetic bonds tying the representation to its prototype. (This maneuver occurs in the *Life of Nikon* as well, discussed later in this chapter.) Theodore of Stoudios defined an icon as “a likeness of that of which it is the image,”<sup>41</sup> just as Nikephoros defined it as “a likeness that characterizes the prototype in such a way that it also maintains some distinction from it.”<sup>42</sup> In these arguments, an icon is posited as the effect of a prior cause – an object the very existence of which is sustained in relation to that cause. In our episode, the cause is conspicuously missing. The deliberate omission of the appearance of the prototype (in any form whatsoever), or of any prior reference point, puts the *skhesis* (relation) between the prototype and the icon at risk.

If the efficacy of verbal and visual references is indirectly debated in the *Life of Theodora* (although neither are ultimately responsible for the icon produced), then the dénouement shifts attention to the saint’s remains. It dramatizes the contest between Theodora’s relics and her image crafted by the artist, John. According to the narrative, after a period of time fragrant oil gushed forth from the right hand of the saint depicted on the icon. The force of the oil washed away the paint, so that a vessel was attached to the icon’s base to stop the oil from spilling over.

The icon here displays the qualities of Theodora's remains. In this capacity, the icon would seem to adhere to pre-Iconoclastic notions whereby the conceptual boundary separating icons and relics was fluid.<sup>43</sup> Before the ninth century, both were regarded as the potential bearers of holy presence, sustaining an essentialist mimetic relation to the prototype. But in the post-Iconoclastic text of the *Life of Theodora*, the icon is decidedly the product of the artist, John, and never comes into physical contact with the saint, thus negating its status as a relic. Although there were instances of icons that temporarily assumed the characteristics of their prototypes, the image of Theodora is different from these. It literally and permanently melts into a different ontological state by means of the oil gushing from its surface. Yet this oil does not efface the entire icon. Poised in a hybrid state, the object becomes both icon and relic. But it remains distinct from the category of the *acheiropoietos*, or the image not made by human hands, such as the Mandyllion.<sup>44</sup> Unlike this famous exemplar, the icon of Theodora never bears the touch of its holy prototype and is explicitly *cheiropoietos* (made by human hands).

Despite assimilating the characteristics of both icons and relics, this hybrid object still cues us to an unmistakable and hierarchical distinction between those two states, whereby the relic is revealed to be the privileged site of presence at the icon's expense. This revelation is accomplished by positing the icon as an *additional* site for the miraculous outpouring of the oil, the lamp at the shrine being the primary receptacle. It is the oil (the relic) that dominates the sacred space by proliferating. Moreover, the usual hierarchies of Byzantine art are reversed, as the border of the icon, to which the vessel brimming with oil was pinned, assumes primacy over the icon itself.<sup>45</sup> Most intriguingly, the icon seems to have been partially canceled out at this stage: the oil (a sign of Theodora's presence) wipes away the paint (the sign of the artist's hand). Although the artist's product is elevated by becoming the site of holy presence, its status is also compromised, even damaged, by the operation of the miracle. The icon here becomes a literal and perpetual backdrop to the relic: the oil pouring from its surface.

The narrative thus concentrates on the question of potential presence in the most popular objects characterizing the Byzantine saint – relics and icons. In the process, it posits the relic as the primary site of presence.

Simultaneously, however, it posits both icons and relics as the *occasional* bearers of holy grace. Just as the icon painted by John poured forth oil only after a temporal gap, so too Theodora's remains at her shrine did not always exude fragrant liquid; recall the time when John and his companion visited the church and found it devoid of the miracle. Presence is revealed as inconstant, even in the case of a relic. By subverting the expectations invested in the faculty of sight and the definition of a relic and an icon, the episode presents a variation on some of the most pressing nodes of Byzantine visuality before allowing the established hierarchies to assert themselves.

Theodora of Thessalonike's icon was accomplished in a sequence of dreams, each an indirect, allusive catalyst pushing the painter to the ultimate goal of producing her portrait. St. Mary of Vizye, on the other hand, took a more direct approach. Scripted later than the *Life of Theodora*, probably in the eleventh century,<sup>46</sup> the *Life of Mary* introduces the saint herself as the agent who prods the artist into action. Before this, however, there occurs an incident whose themes are reiterated in the saint's encounter with the artist, inflecting the latter episode in significant ways.<sup>47</sup>

After her death, Mary first "appeared to her husband in his sleep and asked him to build a church where her remains might be transferred" (Ἐφάνη τότε καὶ τῷ συζύγῳ καθ' ὕπνους ἡ μακαρία καὶ οἶκον αὐτῇ ἀνοικοδομησαὶ εὐκτήριον κάκεισε τὸ λείψανον αὐτῆς μεταθεῖναι). Her husband, true to the habits he had displayed throughout their married life, neglected his wife's request and suffered a just punishment. He discovered that, although his eyes were wide open, he could not see. Sight gradually returned when he embarked on building a shrine to the saint. Once it was built, a brief miracle was reported comprising barely two lines in the narrative, after which Mary "appeared to an artist from Rhaidestos in his sleep" (Ἐν τούτοις καὶ περὶ τὸ Ῥαιδεστὸν ἐγκλείστῳ τινὶ ζωγράφῳ καθ' ὕπνους φαίνεται).

The dream appearances follow each other in swift succession and reflect one easily forgotten point: the temporal lag that obtains between dreaming and waking, and between the command issued in the dream and its execution. Mary's husband was stricken with sickness after some time had passed. His sight was restored in installments, hostage-like, over the period it took to dig a quarry and erect a church. In the artist's

dream, Mary appeared with a retinue – her two sons and handmaiden – with all of whom she desired to be portrayed. When in his sleep the artist asked who she was, Mary replied, “I am Mary from the city of Vizye about whom you have heard much but whom you have never seen till now. Paint my picture as you have just seen me”<sup>48</sup> (Ἐγώ εἰμι Μαρία ἡ ἐκ Βιζύης τῆς πόλεως, περὶ ἧς πολλὰ μὲν ἀκήκοας, οὐπω δὲ μέχρι τῆς νῦν εθεάσω με. Τὴν ἐμὴν οὖν εἰκόνα, καθὼς με ἀρτίως ὄραζ ζωγραφήσας). Here again we encounter the role of verbal reference. What the artist had heard about Mary is deemed insufficient for him to paint the saint’s portrait; hence, Mary furnishes him with a visual reference, albeit in a dream. Predictably, the icon that the artist fashioned was acclaimed as an astonishing likeness of Mary and her children.

And yet Mary’s command to be painted “as you have *just* seen me” (emphasis added) (καθὼς με ἀρτίως ὄραζ ζωγραφήσας) is surely impossible, as it can be carried out only after the artist wakes from sleep. The artist does not paint from direct sight but from his memory of the dream vision. The temporal discrepancy is expressly stated in the events that occurred to Mary’s husband after *his* dream, recounted just a few lines earlier. The circumstances of the two incidents are sequentially similar, right from the initial commission of the icon or church to its completion, and should be read as a pair. Along with the temporal lag, in the artist’s case there is also physical distance, since the passage states that he was from Rhaidestos and had to send Mary’s icon back to Vizye for verification after he had painted it. In short, despite the saint’s appearance to the artist (in contrast to his counterpart in the *Life of Theodora of Thessalonike*), the icon remains at a physical and temporal remove from that dream appearance. The icon is presented as a representation – a portrait that was painted by the artist *after* Mary’s dream vision had disappeared, and acclaimed as an accurate “likeness” (*morphe*) of the saint by the citizens of Vizye, who looked on the icon in astonishment, for it resembled Mary and her children perfectly” (δὲ τὸ εἶδος αὐτῆς ἔτι ζώσης εἰδότες θεασάμενοι τὴν εἰκόνα, θαύματος ἐνεπλήσθησαν καὶ αὐτὴν εἶναι ἐκείνην τὴν μορφήν αὐτῆς τε καὶ τῶν παίδων διωμολόγησαν).

Interestingly, Mary’s icon is never mentioned again. Delineating the requirements of a holy cult beginning with a church dedicated to the saint, then the demand for an icon, the narrative goes on to describe several miracles accomplished at Mary’s shrine. In these, it is Mary’s

relic – her beautifully preserved, whole body – that proves efficacious and is the site of intense visual and tactile engagement, while the icon fades into the background. Mary’s body occasionally emitted sighs and groans of displeasure, or leaped about in exultation in its sarcophagus, attesting to the saint’s presence.<sup>49</sup> In contrast, the church, the dream vision, and the icon form frames of reference in the narrative. They are representational nodes culminating in the focus on Mary’s relic, where her presence is most palpably apprehended.

This is by no means a diminishment of the role of the icon, which was advanced as an integral component of Orthodoxy after Iconoclasm. Indeed, the fact that our episodes introduce not only the icon as an essential requirement of the cults in question but also the miraculous circumstances of its manufacture in each case, bears out its importance. But despite its juxtaposition with the relic, the icon’s distinction from the latter is clearly signaled, if in somewhat convoluted ways. The *Life of Theodora*, for instance, includes a lengthy interlude on the creation of a sarcophagus for Theodora’s relics, which are then revealed to be the site of presence,<sup>50</sup> just as in the episode in the *Life of Mary*. In both texts, the relic is the primary and ultimate site of holy presence, whereas the icon partakes of presence only when it assumes the qualities of the relic, even to the point of its own defacement. The dream appearances add yet another layer of complexity to the narratives. Each of these expressions – dream, icon, and relic – is a protagonist in the episodes, and each urges the reader to engage with the differing sets of mimetic bonds tying them to their prototypes.

### *Ciborium and Taphos: The Reliquaries of St. Demetrios*

The phenomenon of the icon and relic as contiguous but hierarchical, and sometimes competing, force fields of holiness is evident from the developments informing one of the most important cults in the Byzantine Empire – that of St. Demetrios of Thessalonike. The historical circumstances of the cult are an object lesson in how the implications of post-Iconoclastic theories of icons – and our hagiographies – were not merely confined to texts.

The earliest miraculous outpouring of oil (*myron*) at Demetrios’s shrine was recorded in 1040, significantly, at his tomb – significant,

because the focus of the shrine until then was not his tomb but a *ciborium*.<sup>51</sup> This structure was supposedly a hexagon made of silver-plated wood with doors that opened to admit pilgrims. Within was a couch of silver, on which was imprinted the face or figure [*prosopon*] of the martyr. But as scholars have pointed out, the term *ciborium* was replaced by the term *taphos* in virtually all the written sources when the miraculous outpouring of the oil occurred in 1040. Charalambos Bakirtzis has argued that the *taphos* was a structure separate from the *ciborium*; that when there was no longer any need to protect or conceal Demetrios's relics in Thessalonike from the acquisitive grasp of Constantinople, pilgrims' interests shifted from the *ciborium* to the *taphos*.<sup>52</sup> For our purposes, Bakirtzis's claim signals a definite distinction in the eleventh century between a visual focus for Demetrios's cult furnished by the *ciborium* containing the image (*eikon*) of the saint in the form of his face or figure and the *taphos*, which contained his relic and signaled holy presence through the *myron* that gushed from it. Representation and presence are thus clearly distinguished by the vocabulary used, and manifested as such by the articles dedicated to the saint.

The objects commemorating Demetrios's shrine not only emphasize this distinction but also underscore the contingent nature of the icon in contrast to the singular entity of the relic. One example is the reliquary box dated to 1000, now in Halberstadt, Germany.<sup>53</sup> Fashioned as a rectangular door, the front face of the box displays a tiny, full-length, enameled figure of Demetrios, eyes (somewhat perversely) averted to the side away from the clasp. When opened, the door parts to display two further sets of doors: one with a relief bust of St. Nestor, and the other a receptacle for the oil from Demetrios's shrine. The back of the box displays an engraved, full-length icon of St. Nestor.

This Chinese-box effect works to efface one image as it gives way to yield another, and another, and another. And yet because it is a small object, even as the icon of Demetrios parts to one side with the opening of the door, the viewer may still retain a tactile sense of Demetrios's representation with his or her hands as he or she gazes upon the interior. Indeed, the whole point of enfolding the relic within successive layers, in my view, is not only to protect it but also to enable the viewer or owner to experience both the tactile and the visual aspects of the saint. If the reliquary acts as

a mediating agent between its audience and the relic, and educates the former about the latter,<sup>54</sup> then part of its function is to transmit the differing levels of engagement proffered by each sense, and each image, as the viewer moves from one layer to the next. The haptic aspect of vision as per Byzantine optical theory is preserved, while the optical is displaced elsewhere. By opening the door into the interior space, the viewer notices the deliberate distinction wrought between the image on the lid and the image inside. The former is a full-length figure of St. Demetrios in enamel, whereas the latter is a bust-length relief icon of St. Nestor. On flipping the box over, the viewer sees Nestor again, this time as a full-length engraving.

The transformation in the medium and depiction of the same saint – Nestor – from the interior to the exterior impresses the flexibility of the pictorial code for defining the holy being. As a representation, Nestor may be pictured in his entire length or as a bust, in relief or in some other medium. The relic, in contrast, shows no such flexibility. Its significance resides in its uniqueness, and it is accordingly restricted to but one single space in the object. The *myron* gushing from Demetrios's tomb was, of course, inexhaustible, and held in multiple reliquaries. But in this box it stands as a resolutely unique entity in contrast to the repeated representations of Nestor.

The *myron* stands as a sign of Demetrios himself. Demetrios's icon on the front door, therefore, may be said to open in order to yield his presence. But as Patricia Cox Miller has pointed out, the relic is paradoxical in nature, being the sign of a person who is partially present *and* partially absent.<sup>55</sup> Accordingly, the viewer registers presence as a fluctuating quantity from the box's lid to the interior, and within the variegated spaces of the interior itself, as her eyes shift from the icon of St. Nestor to the relic of St. Demetrios and vice-versa. Furthermore, the pictorial code defining Demetrios is also registered as a fluctuation (as is the case with the code defining Nestor). The full form of the saint gives way to an amorphous liquid, but both are equally valid aspects of Demetrios.

The box thus makes a succinct statement about the nature of representation and holy presence. The saint's icon is susceptible to transformation from exterior to interior, from the front of an object to its obverse, *because* it is not invested with presence. Instead, it is a pictorial



code manufactured to identify the saint by means of a few selected characteristics. The relic, on the other hand, is singular and certainly not manufactured by any human hand. Even as the icon shares the same visual space and surface as the relic, it signals its ontological status as distinct from the latter.

### *Morphe and Eikon: The Artist Who “Failed”*

The eleventh-century text of the *Life of Nikon* expands on the tropes of the icon and relic, sight lost and regained, holy presence and its sudden disappearance that we encounter in the narratives of St. Theodora and St. Mary, and the images explored earlier.<sup>56</sup> Moreover, the *Life of Nikon* uses a range of terms for designating the icon that appear, at first glance, to be interchangeable. As I shall argue, though, this is not the case. The terms denote varying degrees of presence and are used precisely in order to allow a perception of the icon that is not static. It is presented instead as a locus of shifting visual significations at each stage of its manufacture and reception. The resonances of the terms are specific to the text in question; they may assume completely different meanings in other texts. But the consistency with which they are deployed within one work reveals the modes in which they are believed to secure (or sever) the bonds between the representation and the prototype in that particular narrative.

St. Nikon had promised a man named Malakenos that the latter would see him, but the saint died before the meeting could occur. Malakenos then commissioned an icon of Nikon from an artist (*Nikon* 44). The desire for Nikon’s portrait here is different from the usual function of portraits as posited after Iconoclasm, whereby they served as reminders of the dead and not as vestiges of the real presence of the subjects they depicted.<sup>57</sup> Malakenos is determined that Nikon’s prophecy (that he would glimpse the saint) should come about; the portrait, therefore, has a certain weight in the narrative. Not referring to it as *eikon*, Malakenos asks the artist “to paint the *emphereia* [or likeness] of the holy one on a panel” (καὶ ἐπέσκηπτε χρωματουργῆσαι τὴν τοῦ ἁγίου ἐμφέρειαν ἐπὶ σανίδος). The significance of *emphereia* will be revealed as the narrative progresses. For the moment, it is worth noting that the portrait becomes the vehicle of Malakenos’s zeal *to see* Nikon, as was

promised him. Does the object desired to be “seen” here refer to Nikon himself, or to his representation? And does Malakenos’s commission collapse the difference between the two? The tortuous mechanics of vision that ensues denies a straightforward response to these questions.

Malakenos described Nikon in great detail to the artist in a *diegesis*, recounting his “form” (*morphe*), his “appearance” or “monastic habit” (*schema*), his hair and clothing, and yet the artist found himself unable to paint the portrait of a man he had never seen on the basis of a *diegesis* alone. The artist’s subsequent paralysis is as astonishing for him as it is to the listener (or reader) of the text, to whom it signals a decisive rupture in the ordinary rules of representation. While the artist’s inability to make the icon sets the stage for the miracle to follow, it also expressly brings into question the relations between words and images.

After Iconoclasm, word and image were posited as different but equal modes of representation.<sup>58</sup> Both were regarded as repositories of memory in relation to the prototype they sought to embody. In the case of a saint’s life, the words are doubly important in that they were expected to transform themselves into another medium entirely. An epistle of Basil the Great scripted in the fourth century and repeated in a ninth-century manuscript (cited in the Introduction) claimed that

he who is desirous of rendering himself perfect in all branches of excellence [must] keep his eyes turned to the lives of the saints as though to living and moving statues, and make their virtue his own by imitation.<sup>59</sup>

By exhorting a reader to look at the lives of the saints as though they are “living and moving statues” (ἀγαλματά τινα κινούμενα καὶ ἔμπρακτα), Basil draws attention to the rhetorical exercise of ekphrasis that was pervasive to Byzantine literary production.<sup>60</sup> An ekphrasis sought to evoke an object, event, or person in words, the clarity (*sapheneia*) and vividness (*enargeia*) of which could conjure the object in front of the eyes.<sup>61</sup> Ekphrasis was necessarily performative but not always conducted in proximity to the object. The verbal discourse often attempted to underwrite the formal and affective power of the object through its own rhetorical virtuosity. The lives of the saints included ekphrastic flourishes as a means of guiding and eliciting response from their audience.<sup>62</sup> In these narratives, words painted “living” or lifelike images

(as per St. Basil's exhortation) of extraordinary emotional power (or at least aspired to such effects) for the listener. A successful ekphrasis, therefore, depended as much on the receptive nature of its audience as it did on the performer's rhetorical skills.

The patron Malakenos did not engage in an ekphrasis but a *diegesis*.<sup>63</sup> Claudia Rapp suggests that a *diegesis* is a narrative characterized by clarity, brevity of style, and plausibility.<sup>64</sup> Indeed, the emphasis on clarity leads to a corresponding reduction in the displays of rhetorical virtuosity and distracting details that ekphrases often contain (and which contribute to their seductiveness). But evidently, a *diegesis* is considered an adequate rhetorical conduit to the making of an image, as our narrative suggests. In this light, when we consider the failure of the artist to translate Malakenos's *diegesis* into an image of Nikon, we are also forced to consider the abilities of the reader, or listener, of the *Life of Nikon* – the artist's analogue, if you will. How effective is this reader, whom we may see mirrored in ourselves, in conjuring a "living image" from the fabric of the text? Do we succeed where the artist fails? The narrative places the artist and the reader on the same side of the equation: both must receive a sequence of words in order to craft an image from it. But within this narrative, the switch from one representational mode to another is presented as untenable.

If the verbal reference furnished by Malakenos fails to elicit an image from the artist, so does a visual encounter. Nikon appeared to the artist in the guise of a monk and inquired why he looked anxious, to which the artist responded by recounting his troubles. The monk then urged the artist to look upon his own countenance, telling him that it was in every respect similar to that of Nikon. The reiterations are worth noting. The artist now assumes the position of narrator as he informs the monk of his predicament, going over the narrative again. This implicit doubling, a narrative within the narrative that repeats the latter, serves to insist upon the circumstances of the commission, its urgency, and the artist's helplessness.

And correspondingly the monk, in his turn, is also forced into a double performance of his identity. He has to support his physical features with a verbal accompaniment that proclaims their concordance with those of Nikon. If an inscription was an integral part of the pictorial definition of a saint after Iconoclasm, as Henry Maguire

argues, then the monk's verbal performance here may be said to function as one.<sup>65</sup> It completes his physical appearance for the artist (and for the reader as well). Significantly, what the monk's words also draw attention to is the artist's inability to relate Malakenos's verbal account of Nikon to the physical presence of the monk, despite the fact that the monk corresponded to the *diegesis* in every detail. Here, one may adduce yet another crucial function to the inscription other than its role in tying the icon to the prototype:<sup>66</sup> the inscription tightens the pictorial definition of the saint because the image alone is inadequate to the task.

This insight is borne out by the actual evidence of icons from the eleventh century. The copious portraits of saints that punctuate the walls of the church of Hosios Loukas are a case in point. Take the groin vault decorations from the crypt depicting four saints in each of the quadrants. One quadrant displays Sts. Nicetas, Mercurius, Eustathius, and Nestor, each a bust-length form in a medallion bordered by yet another roundel. Sts. Nicetas and Eustathius resemble each other to an astonishing degree. Even the arrangement of their costumes is similar right down to the detail of the configuration of the four pearls fastening their *chlamys*. It is not form but the differing planes of color that distinguish Nicetas from Eustathius, and the inscriptions identifying them as such. This statement of formal similarity, laid out one opposite the other, hammers home the fact that the pictorial code for the saints, although scrupulously detailed, was also loosely applied. In the *Life of Nikon* the artist's failure to map the description of St. Nikon onto the monk's features thus reflects a valid loophole in Byzantine visuality. A description, no matter how well crafted, can just as easily apply to another holy person in place of the one in question.

The next stage of *the Life of Nikon* demands careful attention to the text, which is suggestive for its choice of words and the gradual crescendo with which it presents the identity of the monk as that of Nikon himself.

Ἐπεὶ οὖν ἦρε τὸ ὄμμα πρὸς αὐτὸν ἀτενέστερον ὁ ζωγράφος, ἔγνω ἀπακριβωσάμενος αὐτὸν ἐκείνον εἶναι, ὃν ἡ τοῦ Μαλακηνοῦ διήγησις ὑπεσήμαινε, καὶ παραχρῆμα στρέψας ἐν ἧ κατεῖχε σανίδι ἐφ' ᾧ τὴν ὀρωμένην μορφήν ἐκτυπῶσαι – ὡ τοῦ θαύματος. Ὁρᾷ τὴν ἁγίαν μορφήν τοῦ τρισμάκαρος αὐτομάτως τῇ σανίδι ἐκτυπωθεῖσαν.

The artist raised his eyes and scrutinized the monk with attention, discovering that he was indeed the subject of Malakenos's *diegesis*. Turning swiftly to the panel he held in order to model the form that he saw – o, a miracle! He saw the holy form of the thrice-blessed automatically modeled on the panel.

Observe how the artist has to gaze upon the monk a second time, at the latter's bidding, in order to relate what he sees to what he had formerly heard from Malakenos. And yet the narrative indicates that he still does not recognize the monk as the saint. Only when he looks down at the panel in his hand and sees the imprint does he see the "holy form" [emphasis added] (*ten hagian morphen*). In short, the artist can recognize a holy form only *when it appears as an image* and not in the flesh. When finally armed with recognition the artist looked at the monk, "he no longer saw him" (οὐκ εἶδεν αὐτὸν ἔτι) for the monk had vanished. The play of gazes between the artist and the monk is presented in a tableau of increasing knowledge on the part of the artist. And yet, when he looks from the form on the panel to the original, the monk is no longer there. The representation and the prototype are kept at a physical distance from each other throughout the episode. Their relationship is severed as soon as it seems to have been forged, at the climax.

The trope of the impressed form left behind by the monk has been rightly linked to the legend of the Mandylicon, which had a powerful resonance on Byzantine image theory and on actual fresco decorations and icons.<sup>67</sup> An artist sent to paint the image of Christ found himself unable to do so because of the radiance of Christ's countenance and its shifting appearance. Christ helped the artist by pressing his face into a surface, which retained the impression of his features. The resulting image was the Holy Face, a famed *achieropietos*, an image not made by human hands, that spawned several copies in Byzantium and abroad.<sup>68</sup> It is surely significant that the trope of the production of the Mandylicon should be used – directly and indirectly (see the *Life of Theodora of Thessalonike* discussed earlier) – in post-Iconoclastic hagiography. This is not only because the Mandylicon was a powerful tool in the iconophile arsenal as a justification for holy images. I believe its importance resides equally in the fact that it was a troublesome object, and one that complicated Orthodox image theory in disturbing ways. Herbert L. Kessler has remarked upon this, furnishing it as the reason behind

the disappearance of the Mandyllion from public view after its entry into Constantinople. It was a double-edged sword that provoked (a sometimes dangerous) confusion between matter and representation, and the categories of icon and relic, as much as it endorsed the validity of holy images.<sup>69</sup>

But similar though the Nikon episode is to the legend of the Mandyllion, I would argue that it is also fundamentally different. In the original legend, Christ sustained a tactile relation to the panel or cloth, having pressed his face to it. The object thus acquired some of the characteristics of a relic, in addition to being an image. Our narrative, on the other hand, is structured on distance: spatial distance between the monk and the artist, and between the monk and the panel held in the artist's hand; between the artist's powers of sight and what they ideally should be; and not least, between the impressed image and the prototype, who vanishes no sooner than the image comes into being. (Two of these three points apply to the *Life of Theodora of Thessalonike*, with the important exception that in that case there is no interaction between the saint and the artist at all.) The panel is never in proximity to the monk, and so is denied the status of a relic. How then may the final image be understood?

Perhaps I err in referring to it as an image at all, since the text persists in naming it *morphe* (form or shape), and immediately afterward as *ektypotheisa emphereia* (impressed resemblance):

Ὁ δὲ ζωγράφος κατὰ τὴν ἐκτυπωθεῖσαν ἐμφέρειαν τὰ λοιπὰ τῶν  
χρωμάτων προσαγαγὼν καὶ τὴν εἰκόνα τέλειον ἀπαρτίσας.

The artist added the rest of the colors to the impressed resemblance and brought the icon to completion.

Although *morphe*, *emphereia*, and *eikon* seem to be terms that can replace each other in this narrative, this is not so. On the contrary, each term functions with its nuances intact. *Eikon*, for instance, is used only after the miracle occurs and for specific reasons, as we shall see. Similarly, *morphe* may be interpreted differently from *emphereia* in that it refers to "form" or "shape," whereas the latter is a "likeness." *Emphereia* is further qualified in the narrative by another richly polymorphous term – *ektypotheisa*. Stemming from the root *ektypo*, whose meaning in the infinitive is "to model" or "to work in relief," *ektypotheisa* would literally refer to an

object worked in relief. But *ektypotheisa* may also be related to *typos*, whose meanings range from “blow” to “imprint” to “general form” to “original type or model” to “outline, sketch, or draught.”<sup>70</sup> Since the narrative consistently refers to the base as a tablet or panel, *ektypotheisa emphereia* is usually translated as “impressed resemblance.”

By introducing a verb that may equally stand for “modeled in relief” and “imprinted,” the episode compounds its paradoxes. It emphasizes a tactile aspect between the *emphereia* and the monk that is missing. And yet there is one tactile relation the panel sustains consistently: the touch of the artist. Not only does he hold the panel in his hand even as the miracle occurs; he also proceeds to add colors to it when the monk vanishes. Only at this stage does the text refer to the *ektypotheisa emphereia* as an *eikon*. More specifically, the text (inscribed in the preceding Greek passage) says that “the artist applied the rest of the colors (*ta loipa*) to the *ektypotheisan emphereian* [accusative case] and brought *the eikon* to completion.”

If color was the element required to complete an image and breathe life into it, as argued by Liz James, and if color enabled the visibility and identification of form, the assumption is somewhat subverted in this context.<sup>71</sup> Coming at the end of an extended interlude with the prototype who leaves behind a likeness, the addition of the artist’s colors can potentially serve to distance the prototype from that likeness. The terminology used to designate color – *ta loipa*, literally “that which is left over” – supports such a reading, expressly identifying color as a remainder, or residue, instead of an integral part of the icon. This is a direct contradiction of the tradition stretching back to late antiquity that posited the addition of color to a sketch as the completion, fulfillment, and abrogation of the latter – a fitting analogy to the New Testament succeeding the Old Testament.<sup>72</sup> Moreover, the connotations of *ektypo* – a verb that would seamlessly assimilate “working in relief” and “sketch, outline, draft” – suggest that the panel painting in the *Life of Nikon* was perceived to embrace, to a certain extent, the principles of images worked in relief.

Bissera V. Pentcheva has argued that the post-Iconoclastic model for the ideal image was, in fact, the relief icon.<sup>73</sup> Examining the metaphor of seals and imprinting used in iconophile tracts, Pentcheva claims that the processes of impressing and hollowing out in relief were regarded as the

imprints left behind by the prototype in matter, and hence they formed the basis of the ideal *eikon*. The *Life of Nikon* bears out Pentcheva's argument regarding the imprint of the prototype in matter – in this case, the imprint of the monk's form on the panel. But the text also reveals that, as a conceptual paradigm, the imprint is applicable to panel paintings, and that the imprint could be perceived to obtain even without a tactile connection between the prototype and matter. Tactility is not a condition for the manufacture of an icon, even when the prototype allows himself to appear in the flesh.

The application of *chroma* – meaning “surface of a body,” “complexion,” “skin,” or “color” – is the final varnish. A panel painting is conceived as a layered object, and the artist's hand is confined to the outermost surface, the “skin” or *chroma*, or, as in our text, the “rest of the colors.” The dialectic of exteriority and interiority in Byzantine thought is relevant here. Stratis Papaioannou has revealed the modes in which late antique philosophers such as Proclus and Gregory of Nazianzos tried to bridge the gap between a beguiling exterior and a correspondingly captivating interior self.<sup>74</sup> Variations on these ideas are proffered by Michael Psellos and Niketas Stethatos in the eleventh century. In the *Life of Nikon* the outermost surface of the image is the handiwork of the artist. The “likeness” or *emphereia* that forms the initial, innermost layer, or imprint, becomes an “icon” or *eikon* by means of the “remaining” *chroma* when the prototype is gone. In this case, the *chroma* applied by the artist is extraneous because the *emphereia* was sufficient to communicate the identity of the holy one. *Eikon*, therefore, is a term specifically designating the exterior layer and absence, despite the appearance of the prototype during the process of its manufacture. The narrative states that the artist added “the remainder” (*ta loipa*) and thus brought the *eikon* to completion. The *eikon*, even as it ostensibly completes the “impressed resemblance” (*ektypotheisa emphereia*), is presented as a residue (*ta loipa*) of the miracle that just occurred and is already past. The *morphe* and *emphereia* enabled by the monk are made an *eikon* by the hand of the artist.

The narrative might well have concluded at this point in a satisfactory resolution of the icon as a sign of the prototype's absence. Instead, absence is confounded by the patron Malakenos's happy, but (for us) puzzling, response. On being informed in detail (κατὰ μέρος) of the



circumstances of the icon's manufacture, Malakenos is overjoyed since he believes them to have fulfilled the saint's prophecy. He looks upon the image and deems it an unparalleled depiction of the saint (αὐτῆς τῆς ὀρωμένης αὐτῷ ἀπαραλλάκτου μορφῆς τοῦ ἁγίου). The term *eikon* now switches back to *morphe*. Malakenos, in other words, believes that the portrait of Nikon constitutes a sighting of the holy man himself. Recall that it was an *emphereia* Malakenos had requested to begin with, and not an *eikon*. Considering the fact that Malakenos commissioned the portrait as a means of being able to look upon the holy one, the choice of the word *emphereia* attains a vital significance; Malakenos does not want an *eikon*, a "directed absence," an *emphereia* or *morphe* layered over by *chroma*. He desires a sign of presence. The circumstances of the icon's manufacture convince him that the portrait is indeed *not* a sign of absence, a residue or an *eikon*, but something more.

Through the alternation of the terms *morphe*, *emphereia*, and *eikon*, the episode presents a shifting kaleidoscope of recognition and nonrecognition, holy presence and its sudden disappearance. The portrait of Nikon is the site where contradictory mechanisms of vision and representation converge. For the artist, the portrait is at once the site of recognition of the saint and physically removed from the latter, since the panel is always held in his own hands away from the monk or saint. For Malakenos, the icon constitutes fulfillment, and yet he sees only the completed, colored image and not the *morphe/ emphereia* that the monk had enabled.

Some of the tropes of this episode recur in a later section of the *Life of Nikon* recounting the saint's miracles (*Nikon*, 66). Here, too, they serve to underscore the icon as an object devoid of holy presence:

Περὶ δὲ τῆς παραδόξως ἐκτυποθείσης καὶ σκιαγραφηθείσης χειρὸς ἄνευ ἀνθρωπίνης καὶ τέχνης θείας μορφῆς καὶ εἰκόνοσ τοῦ ὁσίου, ἐν αὐτῇ τῇ πάλαι μὲν κεκλιμένη λιθίνῃ πλακί.

The holy *morphe* (form) and *eikon* (icon) of the saint were miraculously engraved and sketched (*ektypotheises kai skiagraphetheises*) on a stone slab, without human hand or art. (emphasis added)

*Morphe* and *eikon* are juxtaposed. Moreover, two verbs referring to two modes of image making are brought together: *ektypotheises* referring to something that "has been worked in relief" or "engraved or imprinted," and *skiagraphetheises* referring to something that "has been sketched" or

“roughly drawn,” or even “drawn with gradations of light and shade.” Each medium contains a different set of associations tying it to the prototype, Nikon. He, according to the narrative, once stood on the slab, interceding with God when an earthquake threatened Lacedaimon.

σαφῶς περιστώσης διὰ τῶν συμβόλων καὶ αὐτοῦ τοῦ ἀμαρύγματος τῆς ἀχρωματίστου μορφώσεως, ὅτι περὶ ὁ μέγας ἐν αὐτῇ ἰστάμενος καὶ τὸ θεῖον ἐξιλεούμενος.

And it proves quite clearly through the symbols and the flashing of the colorless form (*morphoseos*) that the great one was standing there appeasing God.

Whereas both *morphe* and *eikon* are mentioned together at the beginning of the passage, only *morphe* appears at its critical point. The passage claims that it is through the flashing of the “colorless form” (*morphoseos*, genitive of *morphe*) and not the *eikon* that the slab proclaims Nikon’s favor with God. *Morphe*, aligned with *ektypotheises*, “engraved or worked in relief,” is the preferred term for designating the visible apprehension of holy presence. *Eikon*, aligned with *skiagraphetheises*, “sketched or drawn,” is a term used in conjunction with *morphe*, but distinct from it. Whereas, in the episode of the manufacture of Nikon’s portrait, *eikon* specifically signaled the artist’s intervention with color, here it assumes its role as the nonflashing, colorless counterpart to *morphe*. In the *Life of Nikon*, *eikon* is consistently used as a term and an object that does not operate in proximity to the prototype. It is skillfully played off other terms such that the saint’s portrait is imbued with varying degrees of presence during the process of its production and in the circumstances of its display.

### *Charakter* and *Eikon*: The Artist Who “Succeeded”

The *Life of Irene of Chrysobalanton*, dated to the first two decades of the eleventh century, engages a similar rhetorical maneuver as the *Life of Nikon*. The entire text is replete with references to visibility and Irene’s idiosyncratic manipulation of vision, but I concentrate here on only two episodes.<sup>75</sup> The first constitutes one of the lengthiest sections of the *Life*, in which one of the characters is the Byzantine emperor, Basil II, himself

(Irene, 21). One night when poised in a precarious state between sleep and wakefulness, the emperor saw a woman commanding him to release one of his prisoners who, the woman claimed, was unjustly condemned (Ὁ βασιλεὺς δὲ περὶ τὸ μεσονύκτιον ὕπαρ, οὐκ ὄναρ ὄρᾶν ἐδόκει τὴν ὀσίαν Εἰρήνην παρασταῖσαν αὐτῷ καὶ τοιαῦτα λέγουσαν. “Βασιλεῦ, ἀναστάς αὐτίκα τῆς φυλακῆς ἀπόλυσον ὃν καθεῖρξας ἀδίκως . . .”).

When asked by the emperor who she was, the woman replied, “I am Irene, abbess of the convent of Chrysobalanton,” not once, but three times, pricking him in the side at her final announcement (“Ἐγὼ ἡ Εἰρήνη εἰμι τῆς τοῦ Χρυσοβαλάντου μονῆς ἢ ἡγουμένη.” Καὶ τοῦτο οὐχ ἅπαξ ἀλλὰ καὶ τρίτον εἰποῦσαν, νύξασαν ἐπὶ τῷ τελευταίῳ τὴν τούτου πλευρὰν ἀναχωρῆσαι).

The episode introduces Irene’s nocturnal appearance, thus urging the reader (as in the *Life of Mary of Vizye*) to consider her ontological status. The narrative opens by claiming that the emperor was “awake” and “not dreaming.” But once the prick is received, it “awoke” the emperor, who watched in terror as the figure of the woman calmly made its way out of his chamber. As discussed before, dreams that appeared in the boundary between sleep and wakefulness were considered to be of import. The ambiguities in the emperor’s state are, therefore, deliberate, underlining the fact that this particular vision is not to be neglected.

It is not only the emperor whose stance veers between two extremes. The very identity of the woman who appears to him is ambiguous. She names herself, but the onomastic identity does not define her ontological state. As argued by Theodore of Stoudios, the name borne by the prototype may also be used for its representation. However, when designating the prototype, the name is synonymous and strictly in concordance with its referent, whereas in the case of the representation, the name is homonymous, and the concordance is less strict.<sup>76</sup> For Theodore, the sharing of a name by the prototype and its representations leads to a multiplicity of representations, not a multiplicity of prototypes. In the *Life of Irene*, the name “Irene” claimed thrice by the woman invites the question as to what sort of relationship she bears to the actual figure of Irene, abbess of Chrysobalanton. Is it Irene herself, or a representation, a vision, or a dream that signifies her?

When informed by his advisors that the woman might have been the holy Irene herself, the emperor dispatched a band of courtiers to her

monastery to confirm her identity. An artist was included in the retinue so that he might bring back a portrait that the emperor “could compare to the features of the one who had appeared to me” (ἐπόμενον τούτοις καὶ ζωγράφον εἶναι παρήγγειλεν, ὑφ’ οὗ τὸ τῆς Εἰρήνης πρόσωπον εἰκονισθὲν αὐτῷ κομισθεῖη, “ὅπως γνώσωμαι,” φησί, “τὸν ὁραθέντα μοι χαρακτῆρα”). Realizing that he has been granted a divine vision, the emperor still continues to act in bad faith. This particular portrait sitting is informed by suspicion, not Christian zeal, as in the case of all our other episodes.

The phrasing of the imperial command is significant. The artist is one by whom “Irene’s face should be portrayed,” the Greek term being *eikonisthen*, which links the artist’s handiwork with an *eikon*. The sentence goes on to claim that the reason for the commission is so that the emperor may recognize the *charakter* of the one he had seen in his dream. *Charakter* refers to “a mark engraved or impressed,” “distinct in mark, or character,” and “features of the face.” This last meaning would seem to be the most apposite and is used as such in the English translation of the text, but it cannot be isolated from its accompanying connotations. *Charakter* is the distinctive mark borne by Irene; the tactile aspect of “a mark engraved,” which connotes Irene’s matter, or physical presence. The emperor, therefore, makes a perfectly valid distinction between the portrait (*eikon*) to be made by the artist (*eikonisthen*), which is a representation devoid of matter, and the *charakter*, or physical presence, of the original who appeared to him. Even if the narrative paints him in less than flattering colors, this monarch is cognizant of the fact that an icon was designated as “absence.”

When the retinue arrives at Irene’s convent and the courtiers look upon the saint, they are blinded by a flash of lightning emanating from her face. After the flash subsides, Irene shares wise words with them so that they can enjoy “her precious view” (τῆς τιμίας αὐτῆς ὄψεως) and so that the artist can “delineate her *eidōs* [form, shape, or figure] all the more accurately” (ἀκριβέστερον τὸ ταύτης εἶδος διαγράψαντα.). The next stage signals a distinction between the representation that the artist brings back to court, and the prototype – Irene – herself. The text refers to the object crafted by the artist as *to tes hosias ektypona* (τὸ τῆς ὁσίας ἐκτύπωμα) or “the imprint/image/representation of the holy woman.” The use of the genitive (*tes hosias*; of the holy woman) is important. In the *Life of Nikon* the artist looks at his panel and sees *ten hagian morphen*, or “the holy form”; there, through the use of the accusative, the *morphe* (form) itself

was imbued with holiness. In the *Life of Irene*, the text is clear that the *ektypoma* (imprint/image/representation) is not holy in and of itself, but a representation of *the holy one*, thus differentiating between the imprint and the person of Irene.

This prepares the ground for what occurs next: “The courtiers showed the *eikon* to the emperor” – the first and last time we see the word *eikon* in this episode. As he gazed on it, “a flash of lightning suddenly sprang up from it, gleaming terribly before his eyes, and made him cry aloud in terror” (Εἶτα καὶ τὴν εἰκόνα ταύτης ὑποδεικνύουσι, καὶ ἅμα τῷ τὰς ὄψεις ἐπιβαλεῖν αὐτῇ τὸν βασιλέα, ἀστραπή τις ἐξ αὐτῆς ὀξέως ἐκπηδήσασα τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς αὐτοῦ φοβερὸν περιήστραψε, καὶ μέγα τοῦτον ἐκ τοῦ φόβου πεποίηκεν ἀνακεκραγέναι).

After this astounding event, the emperor gazed at the *charakter* in amazement (τὸν χαρακτήρα βλέπων). Observe how the object is referred to as *eikon* when it is physically distant from Irene and framed as a representation of her. It momentarily assumes the quality of Irene’s own countenance by emitting a terrible radiance. After its bout of flashing, the word *eikon* changes seamlessly to *charakter*, linking it to the emperor’s prior use of the term. Just as the emperor’s command distinguished between the artist’s handiwork and the “distinct mark” borne by the woman, so too now the emperor realizes that the flash constitutes the mark, or matter, of Irene herself. The object that was presumed to be a representation by the artist, an *eikon*, reveals itself to be Irene’s holy matter, or *charakter*.

But subsequent events imply that the flash was a temporary occurrence after which the object lapsed back to being a mere *eikon*. The episode ends with the emperor beseeching the presence of Irene herself – a request that contrasts squarely with the patron Malakenos’s satisfaction with his portrait in the *Life of Nikon*. Here, in a refutation of that episode, the emperor is sadly aware of the gap between the portrait and the holy woman and wishes to close it by having her grace him with an audience. Irene refuses his wish but sends him a letter written and sealed by her own hand. The words and the seal succeed the icon as representations of Irene. The emperor, grieved at being denied a glimpse of the saint, derives spiritual succor from her teachings received through the intermediary of messengers. He locates Irene’s continual (and unseen) presence in her words and not the portrait, which is now redundant, the

visual firmly subservient to the verbal. The *eikon* may briefly contain holy presence, but it cannot sustain that relationship with the prototype indefinitely.

This point is forcefully illustrated in another episode that occurs several chapters before the one just analyzed, in which Irene saves a nun tormented by lust (*Irene*, 13). Like the two episodes in the *Life of Nikon* that echo common themes, so too these two episodes in the *Life of Irene* share similarities but in the reverse. The most striking reversal is the element of sustained presence in an image that is revealed to be an idol (*eidolon*) despite its similarity to an *eikon*. Briefly, a nun who enters Irene's convent is tortured by lustful pangs for her former lover. One evening as Irene prays for the nun's well-being, she has a vision of St. Basil who resembles exactly the icon in front of which Irene addresses her entreaties. Basil instructs Irene to go to the Blachernai church, which task she duly performs. While immersed in prayers at that site, Irene has another, more splendid vision in which the Theotokos (the Virgin) herself appears with a radiant, light-filled retinue of saints and maidens. However, the Theotokos is completely invisible because of the brilliance of her countenance.

Notice how the episode presents the same themes that we find repeated in the later chapter; even the names of two of the main characters are identical, designating Basil the church father in one case and the Byzantine emperor in the other. Where the Theotokos's face shone with a (literally) blinding light such that it was invisible to Irene, so too Irene's countenance reflected a similar radiance that blinded the courtiers. Finally, where Irene's portrait manifested that radiance only briefly before it attested to her identity, so the portrait of St. Basil sufficed only as an index affirming the identity of the figure that Irene saw in her vision. It is not Basil's *eikon* that addresses Irene or performs the subsequent actions enumerated in the narrative, but an apparition.

Later that evening as Irene performed prayers in the chapel of her convent, St. Basil and St. Anastasia came flying overhead and dropped a bundle into her unfolded garments. Within were two idols crafted of lead, one resembling the nun and the other her lover, both clasped in an embrace and bound together by hairs and threads. Inscribed on the idols were the names of the sorcerer who had worked his spell upon them and of his apprentices.

These images are remarkably akin to the icons mentioned in the narrative. Indeed, the fact that they resemble the nun and her lover is but another confirmation of the likeness of icons to their subjects, just as the vision of St. Basil resembles the icon in front of which Irene prays.<sup>77</sup> If the inscriptions identifying their evil maker are omitted, the idols might be icons. What firmly brands them as idols, however, is not likeness but their manifestation of the *presence* of their prototypes (the nun and her lover) over an extended period of time.

Byzantine culture was not unfamiliar with images, particularly those in relief, that acted as though they were alive. These were usually statues of the gods and goddesses, emperors and famed courtiers, monsters and mythical creatures from classical antiquity that were exhibited in the public spaces of Constantinople and which were capable of performing various acts.<sup>78</sup> The practice of magic also allowed for the production and use of images on a smaller, more intimate scale.<sup>79</sup> Patriarch Nikephoros argued that an idol was a representation that had no prior cause and existence in reality.<sup>80</sup> The *Life of Irene* subverts this assumption. As the images were consigned to the flames, the lusty nun found herself gradually restored to normalcy of mind and body. The text claims that she was “liberated from her invisible ties” (ἡ γυνὴ τῶν ἀφανῶν λυομένη δεσμῶν), thus clearly establishing the bonds that linked the prototype to the (in this case, false) image. In a dramatic climax, as the flames lick the last of the idols that have already been reduced to nothingness, hideous screams emanate from the charcoal such as those of “swine led to slaughter” (χοιρείων ὡσπερὶ φωνῶν ὅταν τις ἀκούοι πολλῶν σφαττομένων). The idols thus retain animation and presence up to, and briefly even beyond, the point of their final destruction. In this they are remarkably like relics. In the narrative, however, they serve as an ontological foil to the *eikon* to which the *Life of Irene* denies such powers, consistently positing the latter as the *temporary* repository of holy presence.

Both the *Life of Nikon* and the *Life of Irene* adhere to the notion of the *eikon* as absence, but only in the final stages of its manufacture or reception. In the course of the narratives, the *eikon* is revealed to sustain an alternately vital and tenuous bond with the prototype, expressed by terms such as *morphe* and *charakter*. The bond progressively diminishes and is finally severed. The narratives thus accomplish two objectives.

First, they illuminate the *eikon*'s shifting ontological states before it assumes its final expression. Second, and no less important, they deflect holy presence away from the portrait of the saint, even if the latter is brought into being by the prototype.

### Creator and Creation

By bringing the prototype and the icon together (if all too briefly) and by elaborating on the figure of the artist, the *Lives* discussed perform an implicit commentary on the notion of the creator and his creation. An icon was regarded as the natural effect resulting from a prior cause.<sup>81</sup> The artist necessarily occupies an equivocal status in this scheme. Even as he enacts the important role of giving shape to the icon, he also disavows his agency as creator. The artist is, therefore, one who imitates, or represents, what already exists prior to him, as stipulated by post-Iconoclastic statutes.<sup>82</sup> The temporal and spatial distance between the representation and the prototype are not collapsed but lengthened, as the representation is copied by generations of artists, which process inevitably transforms it over time. However, the chain of representational acts is necessary and productive, even as it stretches away from the prototype. The eleventh-century *Life of Kliment* composed by Theophylact, the erudite bishop of Ohrid, communicates these ideas at the beginning, middle, and end of the narrative.<sup>83</sup> Although Theophylact describes the shaping of letters rather than the manufacture of an icon, the *Life of Kliment* offers a meditation on the relations between an invisible prototype and its material expression in ways that resonate with the struggles of our artists.

Theophylact opens with an account of the achievements not of Kliment but of the great brothers, Methodius and Cyril, the missionaries to the Slavs. Equally important for Theophylact is the fact that they were the inventors of the Slavic alphabet. Cyril and Methodius are analogues of the artist in that they craft a *graphie* that can contain and transmit sacred scripture. Soon after introducing the brothers Theophylact includes a quotation from Hebrews 11:3: "What is seen was made out of things which do not appear" (καὶ τῆς τῶν ὄντων ὄντως φύσεως ἐπιγνώμων, μᾶλλον τοῦ ἐνὸς ὄντος, ᾧ τὰ πάντα ἐκ μὴ φαινομένων τὸ εἶναι ἔλαβον), thus swiftly positing the visible as the manifestation



of an invisible cause. In the eighth century, John of Damascus characterized images in almost similar terms as objects that made hidden things known and visible.<sup>84</sup>

Theophylact then describes the process by which the brothers prepared the alphabet. They fasted, mortified their flesh, and begged God to fill them with grace enough to counter the uncouth language of the Bulgarians (not yet converted to Orthodoxy). Their behavior conforms to that of monks aspiring to sanctity; it also parallels the anxieties of the artist commissioned to paint Nikon. Finally, blessed with the grace they sought, Cyril and Methodius proceeded to invent the new alphabet. Even in their capacities as inventors, the brothers are shown to be agents of God. He who breathed life into Scripture allowed the creation of an alphabet that could contain it. Kliment, in his turn, disseminated and extended that alphabet. Sent to the Bulgarians to teach and convert, Kliment duly preached and taught. Specifically, Theophylact notes, Kliment imparted lessons in the formation of letters. He demonstrated their shapes and set unformed hands such that they might execute those shapes successfully.<sup>85</sup>

This ability was deemed important since, according to Theophylact, the dull-witted Bulgarian priests were slow to write in the letters they had been trained to read. Kliment not only explained the meaning of the sacred words; he also trained his flock in their visual and graphic dimensions. In this effort, Kliment assumes the role of an artist who sets his hand to delineating form. The literal shape of scripture is granted a significance equal to its verbal comprehension. But Kliment did not simply propagate the alphabet. Theophylact notes that he also used it to write eulogies, sacred lives, chants, and psalms (*Life of Kliment*, 12). The emphasis on Kliment's prolific written output indicates the necessary changes wrought in the alphabet as its raw material, divinely bestowed, is shaped into polished, extended writings. The transformation of letters into discourse is analogous to the application of color, *chroma*, by an artist to the sketch or imprint enabled by the prototype. In both contexts, representation is a layered process, proceeding from one link to the next. Kliment is positioned in a mimetic chain at the apex of which stand Cyril and Methodius. The brothers transmitted the heaven-sent alphabet to Kliment (and other disciples), who in their turn shaped it into a range of scripted artifacts. By placing Kliment squarely among those who

distorted the form of the alphabet that the saint wielded so well, Theophylact stresses the importance of transmission, regardless of the deviations from the prototype that arise along the way.

The principle of transmission was one that had been underscored in the fourth century by St. Basil. Reflecting on the relationship between the icon and its prototype, Basil remarked that at times the artist deviated so far from the model that the copy was unrecognizable.<sup>86</sup> In the ninth century Theodore of Stoudios contended that the deviations – or, rather, the accuracy of the icon manufactured by the artist –mattered not; what mattered was that the icon bore the same name as the prototype, which itself secured the relationship between the two and simultaneously marked each as separate entities.<sup>87</sup> Considered in this light, Kliment's own actions are justified (as are those of the Bulgarians), as each transforms the alphabet in his own way in the service of scripture. Even as the new alphabet is distinct from the Greek, so too all representations remain distinct from their prototype, no matter how skillful or saintly their creator.

### *Eikon*: Fluctuating Presence

All the episodes in the hagiographies discussed in this chapter are rooted in the principles of visual representation espoused during and after Iconoclasm by the iconophile triumvirate: John of Damascus, Patriarch Nikephoros, and Theodore of Stoudios. As I have shown, however, these principles (no matter their intrinsic contradictions), are not followed verbatim but are presented in creative variations on the themes of visual production and reception, much in the ways that Michael Psellos and his contemporaries did in the eleventh century. The sheer innovativeness evident in a close reading of the texts suggests that their authors were well versed in icon theory and willing and able to experiment with its rules. The writer of the *Life of Theodora of Thessalonike* is a “vivid” and “accomplished” composer,<sup>88</sup> just as the writer of the *Life of Mary* reveals a decidedly literary bent.<sup>89</sup> The writers of the *Life of Nikon* and the *Life of Irene* present innovations on the processes of vision not just in one but in multiple episodes. Our final writer, Theophylact of Ohrid, was certainly learned and renowned for his literary output.<sup>90</sup> Just as each of them uses a range of rhetorical tactics to lead the listener, or reader, through the life

of the saint, so too they deploy the normative processes of making and looking at images, visions, and holy persons in a range of ways that reflect, but also defy and invert the discussions evident during Iconoclasm. As the audience judging the icon of Symeon Eulabes was divided over certain vital questions, so too the reader of the hagiographies is urged to examine similar issues from a variety of positions.

The Byzantine reader, or listener, might easily have encountered some of those issues “in the flesh,” so to speak, during the course of a private miracle, or at the famous Tuesday and Friday miracles of Constantinople, which attracted enormous numbers of pilgrims and spectators. These miracles have received a fair amount of scholarly attention.<sup>91</sup> The Tuesday miracle consisted of the icon of the Hodegetria being miraculously lifted onto the shoulders of a confraternity member, who was then jolted into intermittent, sudden movement by the action of the icon. The Friday miracle consisted of the miraculous lifting of a veil that covered an icon of the Virgin and Christ at the Blachernai church. The veil remained raised all Friday night until it fell again on Saturday morning. The fact that both these miracles took place on ordained days of the week, at specific hours, suggests a deliberate spectacularization of the phenomenon of the icon. Moreover, I would argue that the miracles reflect a desire, perhaps peculiarly suited to the intellectual mentality of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, to publicize and make evident the differences between the icon and the prototype. In both cases, the icons were defiantly – even willfully – inert, before they embarked on their individual acts. The polarities of stillness and motion, the miraculous and the quotidian, encapsulated and dramatized the differences between the icon, and the icon invested with the presence of the prototype. Read in this light, the hagiographies produced at the end of the tenth and through the eleventh century can be said to transmit the polarities and transformations evident in the Tuesday and Friday miracles in the medium of words, between the covers of manuscripts, rather than in the spaces of a church and monastery.

All the hagiographic examples discussed in this chapter adhere to the definition of the icon as a “directed absence” – ultimately. To allow for that definition, however, the icon has to maneuver its way through a set of rapidly shifting stages in the context of both its manufacture and viewing. In the process, it sustains an array of separate, but sometimes

overlapping, relations with relics, other icons, and the prototype. This is evident in several episodes of saints' lives (apart from the ones discussed in this chapter) in which an icon leads the viewer to experience a vision, or an image, or the actual space of a relic shrine, during the course of a healing miracle.<sup>92</sup> The relations between the icon, relic, vision, and the prototype that are illuminated in the process are not purely essentialist or formalist in nature as per their presentation during Iconoclasm, but a creative combination of both – a spectrum of increasing and decreasing intensities that complicates the notion of any single model binding the representation to its prototype. The shifts in the status of the icon are due not least to the corresponding shifts in the roles of the artist and the viewer. Both these characters switch their functions: when a patron (and destined viewer) verbally crafts the subject of the icon for the artist, and when the artist in turn must be audience to that re-creation. The transfer of roles yields a variety of potential depictions of the saint, each of which plays a part in shaping the final pictorial expression, or *eikon*, of the holy one.

It is no secret that the hagiographies, while engaging with issues of representation, remain stubbornly mealymouthed about the actual material conditions of the icons that take shape in their narratives. Descriptions, media, and locations are usually left to the imagination, while the conceptual frameworks surrounding the icon's production and viewing are pondered over. If the texts disclose the icon as the site of shifting visualities and significations mediated by terms such as *morphe*, *emphereia*, and *charakter*, how may these ontological states be reflected in images that do not bear the verbal nuances of the terms or the weight of a textual narrative that manipulates them up to a climax? How did manuscript folios and panel paintings enjoin a viewer to engage with the varied sets of mimetic bonds tying the image (and depictions of relics, dreams, shadows, and visions) to its prototype? To find out, we turn to the [next chapter](#).

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE SAINT IN THE IMAGE

#### Holy Man or Fraud?

In the twelfth century, a distinguished Byzantine canonist happened to mistake a holy man for a fraud. Theodore Balsamon expressed dismay at having misidentified a certain Staurakios Oxeobaphos as an impostor when the man was, in fact, a genuine “holy fool.” Balsamon justified his skepticism by asserting that the proportion of “hypocrites” who simulated ascetic extremism was high in Constantinople. Oxeobaphos was one of a bewilderingly large number of people who aspired to holiness by imitating the gestures, clothing, and habits of the established saints, whether through scrupulous means or otherwise. Balsamon bemoaned the trend, remarking that “many patriarchs arrested many of the chained anchorites . . . along with others who roamed the streets and faked demonic frenzy, and locked them up in public gaols”<sup>1</sup>

Balsamon is not alone in his anxieties concerning the expression of genuine sanctity in twelfth-century Constantinople. Paul Magdalino has shown how commentators such as John Tzetzes, Nicetas Choniates, and Eustathius of Thessalonike are all scathingly condemnatory of false performances of holiness.<sup>2</sup> From their statements, one imagines the cityscape of Constantinople to have been seething with the fraudulent bearers of sanctity, weaving their ways through the fantastic sculptures that littered the city’s fora and which the Byzantines were equally in awe – and sometimes, wary – of. So much so, that in a letter addressed by John Tzetzes to his runaway slave, Tzetzes sarcastically suggests that the young man abandon his trade of sausage production, don a monastic

habit, hang bells from his penis or chains around his neck, and then wait for the gullible lords and ladies of the city to fete him as a saint.<sup>3</sup>

Paul Magdalino reads this outburst of invective in terms of the exalted social, political, and ecclesiastical positions their authors – men such as Tzetzes and Balsamon – held in Byzantine society, and as an index of their contempt of the uneducated members of the masses (including slaves and sausage makers), who successfully passed themselves off as would-be saints.<sup>4</sup>

My contention is that along with the biases identified by Magdalino, the letters and commentaries point to a visceral concern in twelfth-century Byzantium regarding the relations between the holy and its mimetic expressions. In citing individual examples of fraud, Balsamon, Tzetzes, and others present a general critique of what was taken as the reigning model of mimesis. According to this model, the literal simulation of a holy person was perceived to be one of the hallmarks of spiritual ascent – a view our commentators are extremely skeptical of. (There was some debate over the model of literal simulation in a monastic context in the eleventh century, thus indicating a level of concern over the imitation of saints.)<sup>5</sup> Where Tzetzes deplores the transformation of symbols of sanctity (such as the monastic habit) into banal artifacts of cunning, Theodore Balsamon points to the precarious boundaries separating the authentic monk and the villainous hypocrite, both of whom deploy common resources in presenting themselves as holy men.<sup>6</sup> Balsamon and his contemporaries thus alert their audiences to the vulnerable points in such a model of imitation. In doing so, they underscore the potential dangers informing the relationship between the prototype (in this case, a saint) and the representation (a disciple or follower of the holy one who tried to engage in an imitation of the latter).

This insight acquires a certain urgency when we recall that the production of textual hagiography declined sharply in the twelfth century, a period that Hans-Georg Beck characterizes as a hagiographic disappointment in Byzantium.<sup>7</sup> Paul Magdalino observes that the holy man in this era is encountered mainly in the scornful remarks of various commentators. The traditional medium used to describe and elaborate upon a mimetic process of holiness, a veritable journey toward sanctity, was replaced by one that offered a scorching critique of the same. The reflexivity and vigilance prompted by the debate over

the icon of Symeon Eulabes in the eleventh century – that is, a debate over whether a holy person could be regarded as a saint or not – would seem to be the norm urged by the Byzantine literati in the twelfth. In this regard, their commentaries present a striking, if harshly strident, expression of the issues that permeate hagiographic texts of the tenth and eleventh centuries explored in the previous chapter. Once again, they indicate the reigning intellectual preoccupation of the Byzantines, or at least a section of them, with the bonds linking a prototype to its representations.

This chapter explores the material expressions of saints in twelfth-century Byzantium when the practices of sainthood (if not its ideals) were regarded as corrupt and defunct by the elite. The tenth and eleventh centuries saw a vibrant discourse on the saint's portrait icon, but the twelfth century was a rather more nuanced period. While textual hagiography diminished, pictorial depictions of the saints expanded from the portrait to include scenes from their lives. This process is nascent in manuscript illuminations from the eleventh century, as I shall argue. But it attains its fullest and most audacious expression in panel paintings from the twelfth century.

The discursive value of the saint's portrait shifts when it is implicated in a narrative mode. Because a narrative necessarily reshapes and replicates the portrait in order to tell a story, two concerns are revealed to be at stake: first, the relationship of the prototypical image, or the portrait icon, to its own repeated expression in the pictorial field; and, second, the viewer's relationship to each iteration of the figure of the saint. The image type that depicts and manipulates these relationships most effectively is the so-called *vita* or narrative icon, believed to have emerged in the late twelfth or early thirteenth century in Byzantium.

Displaying a portrait of the saint on a panel framed on all four sides (and in some cases, two or three sides) by scenes from the saint's life, the *vita* icon juxtaposes multiple versions of the holy figure. It includes episodes in which the saint appears as a dream, or a vision, or a relic, or absence, thus bringing together the range of ontological states a holy being could assume during his or her lifetime – a veritable “living icon.” Apart from the ontological spectrum, the *vita* icon also displays a broad scheme of iconographic registers by depicting the saint in varied scales, postures, and sometimes even costume, or lack of one.

The formal arrangement of the icon, therefore, urges a viewer to engage with the variations generated from, and intrinsic to, the holy portrait. The flexibility of the pictorial code constituting the saint is exposed as it is embellished upon and, in some instances, dismantled altogether.

The *vita* icon is the most clear-cut and succinct depiction of a saint's ontological complexity in the twelfth century, but its informing principles are rooted in an established visual tradition. Accordingly, this chapter reinterprets some of the most important hagiographic images of the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Starting with the dramatic developments in Passion imagery and the (relatively) terse, unadorned depictions of saints' lives in manuscripts, and moving on to panel paintings, the chapter culminates in the detailed analysis of four *vita* icons depicting Saints Nicholas, George, and John the Baptist. The chapter does not unveil new examples of the icon type, nor does it examine the contemporary political framework that might have led to its development. Despite the sparse archival information, Nancy P. Ševčenko has sketched out a plausible scenario within which to position these images, citing the cross-cultural encounters enabled by the Crusades as a possible reason behind their emergence.<sup>8</sup> I wish to build on Ševčenko's insights by exploring the thriving intellectual concerns of the period, which, I argue, inform the very composition of the *vita* icons and are evident (if in less vivid and explicit form) in prior depictions of the saints as well. These concerns intersect with the representational debates that enlivened post-Iconoclastic Byzantium; the *vita* images give them imaginative and, often, startling expression.

Through a close reading of a range of imagery, I aim to present a compelling new reading of pictorial hagiography in the period whereby the figure of the saint – be he Nicholas, George, or John the Baptist – emerges as a hermeneutic tool. The story of his or her life engages the viewer in a set of questions that interrogate the viability of relics versus icons, pictorial repetition and defacement, visualized speech and silence, and frontality vis-à-vis the profile. The saint, in other words, becomes a discursive mechanism that critiques the salient structures of representation. This dimension is as integral a role of the holy one as is his or her power to persuade a viewer to appreciate the merits of a life spent in following (and representing) Christ.



### The Man of Sorrows and Ontological Conundrums

The development of pictorial lives of the saints is consonant with innovations in Christ and Theotokian imagery in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, a link that has not been explored in the scholarly literature. As Hans Belting has shown, in the eleventh century the Passion narrative was amplified in liturgical celebrations to include the Lamentation, Deposition, and Entombment of Christ – episodes that are not included in the Gospel narratives.<sup>9</sup> In the twelfth century, an iconic form compressed the themes of Lamentation and Deposition in one image: the *Akra Tapeinosis*, or the Man of Sorrows. The events during and immediately after the Crucifixion were expressed through an intense focus on the face and body of Christ. The *Akra Tapeinosis* icon, in turn, generated images of the lamenting Theotokos, which were also roped into the liturgical drama unfolding over Passion week.

At the end of the twelfth century, yet another novel image type developed as a response to certain theological concerns of the period: the *Melismos*, or the depiction of Christ as a human body laid out on a painted altar or a paten.<sup>10</sup> The apse of the church of St. George in Kurbinovo is a case in point: the imagery suggests that the bread broken at the altar is a type, or form, of the physical body of Christ depicted on the painted altar. Furthermore, when the sun's rays fell through the windows of the apse, strategically placed to highlight Christ's body, then the priest and deacons must have experienced the overlapping and contiguous image of three distinct, yet unified forms of the Messiah as broken bread, painted human body, and natural radiance. The melding of all three forms would have been particularly apposite since Christ was often equated with the "light of the world" and in several depictions was shown carrying a text proclaiming the same.<sup>11</sup> This is one instance of how the eleventh and twelfth centuries manifest an interest both in exploring the range of ontological modes that a holy being could assume during his lifetime and in expressing them in texts, images, and architecture.

What scholarship does not emphasize sufficiently is the *ontological* shift entailed in the depiction of Christ as *Akra Tapeinosis*, and its implications for Byzantine visuality (as opposed to Byzantine images per se) at that historical moment. The attention on Christ's status as a

human body that suffered reveals the extreme limit of the doctrine of the Incarnation. As Belting observes, a reading of the liturgical hymns reveals that Christ's death was not, in fact, regarded merely as the termination of his human life. Instead, it was perceived as that moment when his divine nature was liberated from his human self, free to descend to the world below.<sup>12</sup> The Man of Sorrows imagery, therefore, enables a subtle and comprehensive appreciation of Christ's complexity of being his assumption of both human and divine states, displaying the former at its most vulnerable and broken, but simultaneously alluding to the latter, which triumphs over death itself. Not just pointing to the themes of Lamentation and Deposition, the icon of the Man of Sorrows is also a skillful juxtaposition – an overlapping, even – of the two extremes of Christ's nature.

The pervasiveness of antithesis in Byzantine homiletic and hymnographic literature indicates a necessarily synoptic understanding of the gamut of states Christ took on throughout his life. Henry Maguire has analyzed several homilies in terms of their conflation of the past and present: when Mary recalls holding the Christ Child alive in her arms, who then lies without human breath after the Crucifixion, or the juxtaposition of Christ's birth and Mary's death.<sup>13</sup> The arrangement of scenes of the Lamentation in church frescoes reinforces the juxtapositions intrinsic to the written laments; they allude in overt and covert terms to Christ's birth, infancy, and his resurrection, even as they depict his wounded body, death, and subsequent release from human form.<sup>14</sup>

The most stunning pictorial examples to display the range of physical and ontological states of Christ (implicit in the antitheses just discussed) are the templon beams dated to the twelfth century. From the eleventh century, the templon became a more or less official feature of Byzantine church programs, as argued by Sharon E.J. Gerstel.<sup>15</sup> Where the earliest depictions on the beams consist of portraits of the saints, the Theotokos, and Christ, from the eleventh century onward narratives from the life of Christ predominate. These not only define the twelve major feast days of the Orthodox Church but also bring together consecutive views of Christ, or the *logos*, as the half-naked, wriggling child offered to Symeon at the Temple (the Presentation), to a full-length, full-grown naked body receiving the Holy Spirit (the Baptism), to his blindingly radiant, divine form revealed at the Transfiguration, and so on. By the

same token, the scenes of the Crucifixion, the *Anastasis*, and the *Koimesis* of the Theotokos that appear at the end of the beams depict Christ alternating between a dead human body, a triumphantly resurrected being, and a divine form in heaven receiving his mother's soul as her dead body lies in its bier. (Plates IV and V). (In the *Koimesis*, the Theotokos is presented in two distinct ontological states as well.) When we recall that the templon demarcates a space in which the most transcendent transformation occurs, that of bread and wine changing to Christ's body and blood, then the spectrum of scenes outlined on the beams emerges as a fitting choice.<sup>16</sup> Each depiction of Christ on the beam is a part of the greater whole encompassed in the area of the altar, a striking amalgam of all his ontological states in one ensemble. Just as the scenes from the saint's life surround his or her prototypical portrait on the *vita* icon, so too the templon beam displays Christ's life at different stages, even as it encloses the space that holds his real body and blood.<sup>17</sup>

Images of the saints follow a similar, if slightly delayed, trajectory. The visual evidence indicates that in the eleventh century the saint's portrait flourished, whereas the twelfth century saw the emergence of extended narrative cycles of the holy life. As the Passion narrative expanded, so did the impulse to engage a viewer in an amplified set of stages defining the holiness of the saints and the ontological variations their sanctity entailed. The corpus of illustrated manuscripts depicting the lives of the saints invites such engagement. It is an appropriate starting point for our inquiry, as these codices cleverly condense the principles informing panel paintings from the twelfth century.

### Nascent Narratives: The Metaphrasteian and Imperial Menologia

Illustrated manuscripts containing narratives of saints' lives arranged according to the liturgical year cluster in the second half of the eleventh century.<sup>18</sup> The texts are drawn from the official redactions of holy lives made by Symeon Metaphrastes in the tenth century; these manuscripts are, therefore, labeled the Metaphrasteian menologia by scholars.<sup>19</sup> Along with this corpus, there exists a set of manuscripts known as the Imperial menologia, as these contain prayers on behalf of the Byzantine emperor at the end of each saint's life. Nancy P. Ševčenko's research suggests that

the menologia, particularly those in the Metaphrasteian edition, may have been intended for monastic use but may at times have also served the personal needs of the laity, especially intellectuals and important political figures.<sup>20</sup> The Imperial menologia might have been used for a special imperial office recited before *orthros*.<sup>21</sup>

The Metaphrasteian menologion consists of ten volumes, and Ševčenko furnishes an extensive study of the composition and distribution of images in each edition. Thanks to her efforts, we can begin to formulate ideas about the navigation of text and image demanded by these manuscripts. The discrepancy between the detailed written materials and the relative brevity of the images demands a certain degree of involvement, and also autonomy, on the part of a reader, who must forge meaningful relations between the copious flow of words and the single image, or the abbreviated suite of images, accompanying them.

The icons of the saints appear in any number of possible combinations with the texts.<sup>22</sup> In one edition of the Metaphrasteian menologion, the opening folio depicts several saints in multiple rows as a pictorial table of contents for the entire manuscript. In another edition, an icon of the saint precedes each individual text. In yet another, only the opening text of each of the ten volumes is accompanied by an icon of the saint whose life it describes. These icons are portraits, usually full- or bust-length depictions displayed against spare backdrops, the details concentrated on the dress and facial features of the holy ones. In each of these, a portrait stands in for the narrative; the single image represents the lengthy course of the holy life with its tribulations and triumphs and, most importantly, the transformations sustained by the saint as vision, or dream, or relic, as the case may be.

Where the text unfolds spatially over the folios, the icon is fixed not only in its pictorial composition but also in the space it occupies within the manuscript. The static quality of the icons is further underscored by the temporal rhythms that regulated the reading of saints' lives. As Ševčenko points out, the entire text was read through at one sitting during the monastic routine. Sometimes, however, it was divided into sections to be read over the course of the day, even extending to the *orthros* of the following day.<sup>23</sup> While the text proceeds both temporally and spatially, the icon is curiously still in every respect.

But the evidence of certain editions of both the Metaphrasteian and Imperial menologia implies that the icon was as dynamic an element of the manuscripts as its textual counterpart. In some editions of the Metaphrasteian menologion, for instance, it is not the canonical portrait of the saint that precedes the text but a scene from his or her life, which is more often than not the moment of the saint's martyrdom. Prefacing the life of a saint with an image of the moment of death is efficacious. It signals the fact that the saint's day – his or her position in the liturgical year – is the one on which he or she expired. But the martyrdom scenes are equally effective in signaling a reversal of the narrative itself: the icon depicts at the opening of the text that moment which lies at or close to its end. The spatial and temporal disjunction between the icon and the text suggests a level of flexibility in the interactions between them that we find echoed in panel paintings as well; the icons illustrating a saint's life need not correspond to the exact sequential order of the text, even when they accompany it.

Moreover, the martyrdom icon is a cue for the ways in which the text imbricates the image as it progresses. If the portrait icons are concise, the martyrdom scenes are more lavishly embellished. The killings invariably occur in landscapes replete with flora and fauna, and sometimes against architectural backdrops. The addition of these extraneous details is in keeping with the normal practice of ekphrasis, in which an artful verbal narrative enables a vivid visual apprehension of the subject at hand, enriched with all manner of incidental details. At least one manuscript in Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, gr. 1017, attests to this: a standing portrait of the saint precedes the text and a scene of his martyrdom adorns its very end. The differences between the opening icon and the one that closes the narrative are graphic. This is the case with the *Lives of the Five Martyrs of Sebaste*, the narrative of which begins on fol. 211r. The text is prefaced by a miniature depicting the five martyrs in a row, each dressed meticulously and wielding his instrument against a plain background. On fol. 234r where the textual narrative ends, the portraits are transformed. The space occupied by the image shifts from its position above the text to the right of the folio. Where the standing, frontal saints occupied a unified field at the beginning of the narrative, at its end the single row is pulled apart, and the saints distributed over three rows. Each one is shown being

subjected to torture, except Eustratios, the leader, who is forced to witness the torments of his comrades.

The stark differences in the portrayal of the saints from the opening folio to its conclusion are significant. One might argue that the textual narrative alerts the reader to a commensurate pictorial narrative, even if the pictures are not made visible on the parchment. The initial matrix identifying the saints is literally wrenched apart in the martyrdom scenes. Not only are their individual bodies defaced, but the space accorded to them also shifts and expands. This signals the flexibility of the holy portraits and the visual field granted them on the surface of the folio. A reader who is as attentive to the icons as to the text is alerted to the arc linking the initial portrait to the final scene. The former is gradually transformed, dissolved in parts and ornamented in others, as it assumes the shape and accoutrements of the closing image. The process of reading the saint's life, therefore, is structured by the concomitant acts of building up and taking apart the figure of the saint over the course of the narrative in both textual and pictorial terms.

The ability to resurrect a scene even when confronted with its ruins and, conversely, to transform wholeness into fragments is essential to the practice of ekphrasis. This, as discussed in the previous chapters, was one of the major modes of response to hagiography. One apt example may be found in the *Life of Theoktiste of Lesbos* in which the narrator describes the ciborium of a church in marvelously eloquent terms only to reveal a few lines later that the structure is, in fact, shattered to pieces, even as the narrator describes it.<sup>24</sup> There is a twofold value to this process of construction and deconstruction, as it were. First, the more distorted or disfigured an image, the better it sticks in the memory, according to medieval rhetorical treatises and mnemonics.<sup>25</sup> The very act of taking apart the figure of the saint, then, would ensure that its memory endured. Second, the fact that Byzantine images often leave it to the viewer to perform the "disfigurement" puts a special onus on him or her; the viewer is expected to be an active participant in the events of the holy life, partaking not simply of the good, but also of the violence wreaked in it.

The menologia engage this impulse to expand upon or, alternatively, to diminish a given matrix as they induct the reader or viewer in the cycle of blessings and torments implicit in the saint's life. Simultaneously, other figures are sketched in to the life, along with the gradual addition

of background details. Yet even these “extras” are taken apart in the final count, as is evident from the intentional defacement of the features of almost every “executioner” figure in the Copenhagen and Moscow manuscripts of the *Metaphrasteian menologion*.<sup>26</sup> As signs of response, the defacement is to be lauded. It signals a reader, or readers, who have interacted with the image in tune with its textual rhythms. They have evidently evinced a righteous anger against the assassins of the holy ones, leaving tangible marks on the parchment of their affective incorporation into the saints’ tales.

### Twelfth-Century Developments

The framework of image-text engagement enjoined by the eleventh-century manuscripts is sharpened, even as it is drastically modified, in panel paintings. Although there are a few precursors in the eleventh century, a truly impressive range of compositions emerges in the twelfth century on objects as diverse as diptychs, triptychs, beams, and panels large and small. In certain cases, a large portion of the holy community is compressed onto a single surface, such as the menologion icons located at the Monastery of St. Catherine at Sinai, Egypt.<sup>27</sup>

Menologion icons are the natural counterparts of the menologion manuscripts.<sup>28</sup> These panels display a range of saints’ portrait icons, at times interspersed with martyrdom scenes ([Plate VI](#)). Where the manuscripts eschew elaborate images of the saints, which are nonetheless an integral, if implicit, component, the panels eschew texts. These are implicit, or appear as aural accompaniments to the images when read aloud on the saint’s feast day.

The menologion icons prompt reflections on the division of time. Each day of the year is granted a specific shape through the physical identity of the saint whose feast falls on that day. The eternal stillness of heavenly time (*aeon*) is apprehended as sensible, contingent time (*chronos*) because of the visual matrix defining it. By dividing and shaping time, the menologion icons also urge an understanding of temporal movement. This concept is expressed in terms of the implied narrative compressed into each portrait. The *Life of Pancratius*, for instance, demonstrates the mnemonic potential of the portrait icon by stating that it leads the viewer to recollect various events in the life of the one depicted

on it; the saint's portrait, in other words, triggers off a corresponding narrative.<sup>29</sup> The end of the (implicit) narrative yields the portrait of the saint that follows in the insistent succession of spatial grids defining the menologion icons. These implicit narratives furnish the links between the grids and the figures occupying them: a sequence of holy lives expressed through the medium of hagiographic texts (abbreviated or otherwise) read out on each saint's feast day. The viewer reads or imagines (in text or images) each holy life, at the end of which another begins.

In this context, the martyrdom scenes acquire a special importance. Martyrdom is that moment which enables the saint's transition from the status of living vessel of the divine to a relic imbued with divine grace. Visually, the moment of the saint's martyrdom is also the moment when the holy portrait is mutilated. On the menologion icons, the gesture of mutilation is sometimes (but not always) arrested such that the portrait remains intact, if rarely erect and frontal. What the viewer beholds is the moment right before the dismantling of the icon. To complete the story and to move on to the next grid, the actual destruction of saint and portrait, and the transformation of *aeon* to *chronos*, must be performed in the imagination, textually or pictorially, by the viewer.

In some instances, however, this gesture is already performed. What the viewer registers, then, is the pictorial transition of the saint's portrait to a fragment, or a relic. In the process, the saint's ontological status is altered. This alteration need not be depicted only through the obvious changes wrought on the saint's body by the sundry tortures during and after martyrdom. It may come across even in depictions of the saint in his or her (ostensibly) complete physical form. One excellent example of such a phenomenon is the wooden panel depicting four scenes from the life of St. Nicholas, located at the Monastery of St. Catherine in Sinai, Egypt (Fig. 1).

Kurt Weitzmann, following George and Maria Soteriou, dated this panel to the eleventh century, arguing that it was part of a larger structure containing several scenes from Nicholas's life.<sup>30</sup> While the program posited for the entire structure is speculative (apart from two scenes depicting Nicholas's consecration as a deacon and a bishop), the selection of scenes on the panel that exists is significant; indeed, it is a precursor to the visual strategies employed on the *vita* icons. The scenes indicate a concern to depict the distinct statuses assumed by the saint





1. Scenes from the life of St. Nicholas, Byzantine, eleventh century, Monastery of St. Catherine, Sinai, Egypt. Courtesy of the Michigan-Princeton-Alexandria Expedition to Mount Sinai.

across a single visual field. Four episodes are shown, two each arranged adjacently in both horizontal and vertical axes. The first episode depicts three soldiers falsely imprisoned; the saint does not appear at all. The following episode on the right depicts Nicholas appearing to the

emperor to command him to release the prisoners. The episode on the left, below that of the three prisoners, depicts a variation on the previous one. Nicholas is shown in a similar composition, but this time appearing to the eparch, Ablabius, who ordered the imprisonment of the three soldiers. The fourth and final scene depicts Nicholas's funeral.<sup>31</sup>

The panel succinctly figures Nicholas in three states. In the episodes with the emperor and Ablabius, his image signifies not the saint himself but his status as a dream vision, or apparition. The ambiguity entailed in the image (the firmness of Nicholas's figure notwithstanding) is implied by the depiction of the dreamers, or visionaries, in bed, signifying their own state between sleep and wakefulness that enables such encounters. The episode of Nicholas's funeral is a formal counterpart to these two scenes; now Nicholas is the one put to rest. His body is prone on its bier while a priest prays over it. Nicholas's full-length form wrapped in funerary garb maintains a tension with its simultaneous definition as a relic, which the saintly body becomes at the moment of death. The first scene, depicting the three prisoners, is completely devoid of the saint's presence. And yet the saint's biography states that during their time in prison the unfortunate men prayed to Nicholas, famed for his powers of intercession.<sup>32</sup> In the first episode, therefore, the holy one is visually absent but present in the prayers of the prisoners, functioning, perhaps, as an acoustic presence.

In each episode Nicholas's ontological condition differs. The iconic formula identifying him remains the same, but it signifies states as diverse as a vision, a relic, and absence, even while depicting (or not depicting) the saint. These identities are expressed no less through the attitudes of the people and objects surrounding him. In the scene of Nicholas's funeral, a bishop dressed in identical ecclesiastical garments presides over the bier. At first glance, the bishop appears to be Nicholas himself, thus sustaining the illusion that this particular iteration is yet another state the saint assumes. On looking more closely the viewer realizes that Nicholas's figure is in eternal repose.

The physical resemblance between the bishop and Nicholas (and the possible misidentification of the latter for the former) is telling for its implications about the panel as a whole. It implies that each depiction of a figure, no matter how superficially similar to its previous expression, cannot be taken for granted as that figure itself. By extension, each

depiction is also potentially informed by changes in its ontological state. This principle is displayed in elaborate form on one of the most beautiful and puzzling objects from the late twelfth century in Byzantium: a beam depicting the miracles of St. Eustratios.

### The Eustratios Beam

The “Eustratios beam,” as it is termed by Byzantinists, located in the Monastery of St. Catherine at Sinai, is an anomaly (Plate VII).<sup>33</sup> Yet it points unerringly to the general trend of the period of depicting the range of altered states a saint could take on during and beyond his lifetime. The first anomaly is that each scene on the beam depicts a posthumous miracle performed by Eustratios. No text of the miracles of Eustratios exists, and the depiction of posthumous miracles is rare in the repertory of Byzantine art. The beam, therefore, raises the thorny and persistent issue of presence: Does the imposing figure of Eustratios swathed in crimson and blue and punctuating each grid, refer to the saint himself or, as in posthumous accounts, to a vision of the saint, or an icon of him? And how are those separate roles mediated by the beam and its beholder?

The second anomaly is no less compelling. In three scenes Eustratios’s relics are depicted along with the figure of the saint. While relics themselves were sometimes inserted into Byzantine icons, *images* of relics, with the exception of icons of John the Baptist, almost never appear alongside an image of the holy one. Their conjunction in the same pictorial field, therefore, foregrounds the question of presence with some aggression. The viewer is confronted with two potential, even competing, force fields of holiness, and is urged to assess the implications of their unexpected coexistence. The beam thus offers a visual reflection of the very issues informing the episodes in the *Life of Theodora of Thessalonike* and the *Life of Mary of Vizeye* explored in the previous chapter. The juxtaposition of an image of a saint with an image of his relics demands a rigorous interrogation of the viability of pictorial representation in picturing a site of presence.

In each scene the saint is engaged in a healing miracle, and is depicted with the patient and a motley crowd of onlookers that waxes and wanes. The architectural backdrop recurs so that the beholder encounters a

fairly uniform configuration. The repetition of the structures hints at a specific site, possibly the popular healing shrine of Eustratios located in Arauraka in Armenia. Apart from the architecture, it is the figure of Eustratios that stands out for its repeated depiction. Composed of long, continuous lines and planes of red and blue, the saint sports dark hair, dark skin, and a beard. The confident and detailed appearance of this figure, taller and larger than the others, suggests its adherence to a pictorial code. Except for the opening scene in which it faces outward, the figure of Eustratios maintains a similar posture and position, turning back inward and occurring serial-like across the length of the beam until it is reversed in a mirror image on the other end, in the final scene.

The repetition is akin to early Byzantine depictions of saints in which their repeated portrayal served to emphasize the repeated invocation of the sacred name. This practice was discontinued after the ninth century as a potential recourse to magic.<sup>34</sup> The figure of Eustratios, therefore, stands not as a comforting reiteration of the saint's powers but as a cipher. The beam illustrates an artistic principle that was no longer tenable in the twelfth century, and which indicates a larger agenda than the depiction of the afterlife of Eustratios on it.

Each of the three scenes with the saint's relics depicts a healing miracle. However, only the first two scenes (following the grid from left to right) name them in their accompanying inscriptions as Eustratios's remains (*leipsanon*). Although the text credits agency to the relics, their depiction in each case is ambivalent. The first scene shows a miracle involving the cure of a man possessed by madness (Plate VII, above). The composition displays a geometrical clarity: the figure of Eustratios stands apart on one edge while a small group comprising three people appears on the other – an arrangement we find repeated in greater or smaller numbers in almost every scene. The afflicted man, however, is pitched forward in a sharp diagonal that breaks the decorous distance preserved faithfully between Eustratios and the patient in every other scene. Moreover, Eustratios's gesture of the lifted hand and the straining of the man's head toward it seem to enact the classic medieval contract of the offer and receipt of a blessing.

The relics, which supposedly perform the healing and should take center stage, are elbowed out of this charged encounter. They are held in an ornamented box, all the less imposing when compared to the

towering figure of the saint swathed in bold splashes of color. Securely balanced in the hand of the priest, the box is shrouded in his sleeve in a gesture of reverence, much like that assumed (unwittingly or not) by the insane man. Observe how the contours of this sacred container cling perfectly to the figure of the priest, almost as if it were *his* attribute rather than an integral part of the holy figure across. The inscription could not be more explicit: “The holy Eustratios heals the man suffering from the malady of eating his flesh *by means of his relics here*” (Ευ[σ]τρατιος θεραπεβων του μενομε[νον] κε τας σαρκας αυτου κατεσθιοντων δια των αυτου λιψανον τον ενταυθα). Not only are the relics named, but underscored is the term ενταυθα, the primary meaning of which is “here” or “hither.” As a deictic signifier, “here” indicates a degree of physical proximity; a perception that the viewer and the object so located are almost adjacent to each other, or that they occupy a common space and time.<sup>35</sup> Otto Demus’s brilliantly perceptive observation about Byzantine icons sharing their space with that of the viewer comes to mind here (although Demus was referring to monumental mosaics in his work).<sup>36</sup> But the fact that the templon beam in question is a representation complicates the possibility of the presence of the relics it depicts, as does the word ενταυθα. Does the depiction refer to the shrine in far-off Armenia where the relics were kept, in which case “here” signals well beyond the beam and its location in Sinai, or does it refer to the pictorial field presented to the viewer; the site shown on the beam’s surface? The authoritative tone is compromised when we look upon the scene for the relics are startlingly not *here* but muffled away and not engaged in performance in comparison to the figure of Eustratios.

The disjunction between the text floating at the top and the afflicted positioned right between Eustratios on the one hand and the relics on the other, thus creates a triangle of intrigue, an embarrassment of choice. Exactly where do the healing powers emanate from: the saint, or the relics, and to what degree? The status of the saint himself, for all its color and dash, is deeply uncertain. Is this Eustratios, or an appearance (*epiphania*) or vision of the saint, or his image? In Byzantine accounts of posthumous miracles, time and again there is a slippage between each of those states of being, which confusion the beam translates pictorially.

The other two scenes deploy the same formula of the saint, the relics, and an afflicted person in the process of being cured, but the compositions reverse and extend the stresses of the first scene. In the second frame, the patient is clearly turned away from Eustratios; the relics have left their secure resting place in the hands of the priest; and the box is now in direct physical contact with the afflicted (Plate VII, above). Eustratios himself seems gratuitous; whether he is visible to the people in the crowd that hovers behind the bed is doubtful. They look toward him, but some of their faces are obscured and their lines of sight do not always converge on the saint. Once again the inscription acknowledges the relics, attributing the cure directly to the *leipsanon*: “The holy Eustratios cures the one suffering from phrenitis through his relics” (Ὁ ἅ[γιος] Εὐ[σ]τρατίου ἠομενοῦ τοῦ φρενιτι[ί]ου διὰ τῶν αὐτοῦ λειψάνου). The lack of interaction between Eustratios and the afflicted in this scene, as opposed to the first one, indicates the active role attributed to the relics in both text and image. But what is the status and role of the figure of Eustratios then, and what powers does it contain vis-à-vis the relics?

In the final scene, the relics are positioned in direct tactile contact with the afflicted (Plate VII, below). The latter is shown seated with the reliquary box placed right on top of his head. Unlike the patient in the second scene who turns away, this man tentatively stretches out a hand, perhaps in prayer or appeal, toward Eustratios. This time the inscription makes no mention of the relics. Stating “The holy Eustratios cures the man suffering from tetanus” (Ὁ ἅ[γιος] Εὐ[σ]τρατίου ἠομενοῦ τὸν ὑπο τετάνου εἰχομενον), it ascribes direct agency to the saint. Paradoxically, when the relics become most visible and assume their strongest pictorial expression, they (and their powers) are banished from the running textual discourse.

The omission is not incidental. Rather, the discrepancies evident between the texts and the images are significant for the ways in which they position the viewer, who is expected to read and view with attention, preferably in order, so that the sudden disjunctions in each scene are registered. (The scenes and the inscriptions are large enough to have been viewed clearly from a short distance). The gradual “coming out” of the relics is presented as a dramatic advance from cloth-layered shell to an independent object unencumbered by a supporting backdrop. Accordingly, the viewer is made aware of the powers and limits of the

relic in relation to the other states Eustratios could assume in his afterlife. The critical point, however, is that even as it urges such awareness, the beam refuses to posit either the relics or the figure of Eustratios as a unique source of divine charisma.

The rest of the beam sustains its preoccupation with issues of presence, even when the figure of Eustratios does not have to compete with the image of his relics, as it were. In the scene following directly upon the first episode with relics, the inscription states that “the holy Eustratios cures through an appearance” (Ο ἁ[γίος] Εὐ[σ]τρατίος ἠομενος τὴν ὑπομ[ε] τρίτου κατεχόμενον δια τῆς αὐτοῦ ἐμφανίας) (Plate VII, above). The specification of the mode in which the saint effected a cure – through an epiphany, or appearance (*epiphania/enphania*) – again triggers several questions. Is the “epiphany” a sign of the saint himself, or a vision of him? And since the figure in this scene is almost exactly similar to its counterparts, are we to read “epiphany” as the norm for all the scenes? Or does its omission in inscriptions before and after indicate that this particular figure is ontologically different from the others?

The same questions may be brought to bear on the second scene from the left in which “the holy one awakens the [. . .] (abraded) in time for morning prayers” (Ο ἁ[γίος] Εὐ[σ]τρατίος ἐξινιζῶν τοῦ [. . .] ἐν τῷ νῶο τούτῳ πρὸς τοὺς ἐοθινοὺς ὑμνοὺς) (Plate VII, above). This is also the first and only scene in which Eustratios enters into physical contact with a living human being who is not afflicted. The tip of the saint’s forefinger rests not on the man, but on the blanket. The man’s eyes are wide open, but it is unclear whether the saint is registered by him, and whether the figure is a dream, or a waking vision. Similarly, in the scenes following the depiction of the Deesis, a youth plies the *semantron*, used in the Orthodox Church as a summons to service, while in the adjoining scene Eustratios appears mounted on a dazzling white horse. (Plate VII, below). Is this an indication that the aural power of the *semantron* and the church service is powerful enough to conjure the presence of the saint being celebrated? Or is the depiction of Eustratios a vision accompanying a reading of his life?

The best counterpoint to this scene and its expression of uncertain visual contact is the one in which a paralyzed woman is bodily lifted by Eustratios’s four saintly companions, Eugenios, Orestes, Mardarios, and Auxentios (Plate VII, below). All four are depicted in the afterlife

with shining haloes of gold while Eustratios remains aloof, hand outstretched in the familiar gesture of blessing, but set apart from the main action. If the depiction of the relics in the scenes discussed previously competes with the figure of the saint, even rendering him redundant to a certain extent, here the four companions perform that same function. The narrative on the beam, therefore, displays a permutation of the Byzantine model of extramission.<sup>37</sup> It deliberately separates the haptic from the optic by depicting the former unambiguously (as in the scenes with the relics and the four companions) and by investing the latter with a relative equivocation.

Holding the scenes together in the middle of the beam is the Deesis (Plate VII, above). Featuring Christ enthroned with the Theotokos and John the Baptist flanking him on either side, the Deesis encompasses the themes of witness and intercession.<sup>38</sup> The Theotokos transmits supplications from the mortal world to the attention of Christ, whereas the Baptist enacts his role as the one who bore witness to the Messiah. The Deesis regularly features at the center of templon beams depicting the twelve feasts of the Orthodox calendar. However, its presence on the Eustratios beam reinforces the ambivalences regarding witness to holy presence that the rest of the scenes display. Moreover, the abrupt acknowledgments and silences in the inscriptions regarding the status of Eustratios's figure are suggestive. Like the Sinai panel of St. Nicholas discussed earlier, they pose the insistent question of whether an image can be taken for granted as to what it depicts, and whether visibility also always implies presence. In doing so, the beam hints at the profoundly contingent nature of vision which, if deployed with attention to the pictorial and textual details depicted, will not allow us to respond to each expression of Eustratios as though it were the same as the preceding one.

### The Case of the *Vita* Icons

In the latter half of the twelfth century and early years of the thirteenth, a pictorial format emerged which offered numerous variations on the questions urged by the Eustratios beam: the *vita* icon. Scholarship has attempted to trace the lineage of the image type, pointing to the cultic depictions of Mithras and Herakles from late antiquity, consular



diptychs, images from the Augustinian Gospels, and Carolingian ivories depicting Christ flanked by episodes from the Gospel.<sup>39</sup> However, none of these “ancestors” can be decisively related to the composition of the *vita* icons. For one, they are temporally distant from the period in which our icons appear. Even if we consider the possibility that Byzantine visual culture retained ancient motifs which it later adapted to the depictions of saints, none of these putative “models” quite depicts the range of pictorial mutations effected on a magnified, prototypical figure serially on their flanks as do the *vita* icons.<sup>40</sup> Their most persuasive pictorial relations, both formally and temporally, are the templon beams, as Nancy Ševčenko remarked in an important essay on the subject.<sup>41</sup> The beams proffer the same visual experience of an uninterrupted, serial depiction of figures. The frames of the *vita* icons resemble them, bent around the center of the panel as a painted border of sorts.

No less than their ancestry, the period of emergence of these icons is also under question. While Ševčenko argues for the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, some have advanced an earlier date. Supposedly corroborating the latter argument is a *vita* icon of St. Marina, now in Paphos, Cyprus, which has been variously dated to the eighth, ninth, eleventh, or twelfth century.<sup>42</sup> This icon is badly damaged. The few scenes that are visible depict tortures in which Marina, in a refutation of her portrait in the center, appears naked and vulnerable. This maneuver posits an intact portrait of the saint and its horrific destruction in the same visual field, thus conforming to the kinds of juxtapositions evident in other *vita* images as well, particularly those of St. George. While the similarity between the violent martyrdoms depicted on these icons does not automatically suggest that they were manufactured in the same period, it is difficult to believe that the image of St. Marina could date much earlier than the late ninth or early tenth centuries. The social and intellectual conditions enabling the format in which she is presented – discussed in earlier sections of this chapter and below – preclude the possibility of an earlier date. Even if we were to accept the fact that the icon was made before the ninth century, its counterparts seem to fall most plausibly into the later time frame posited by Ševčenko. The *vita* format was used in both the Slavic world and the Latin West in the early thirteenth century, thus pointing to the late twelfth and early

thirteenth centuries as the period in which the image type flourished in Byzantium as well.

The reason why the twelfth century should have enabled the emergence of the *vita* icon is explained by the developments in hagiographic texts and images explored so far, each of which shows a concern with delving into the various facets of the icon-prototype relationship. The *vita* icon brings together two distinct categories: the ostensibly fixed, circumscribed portrait denoting the holy prototype, and narrative scenes in which the prototypical image is not frontal, but turns, presents three-quarter or half-length views, and even vanishes. Such a sequence of hagiographic episodes was evident on the walls of churches, but the *vita* icon is the first example in panel painting to depict the phenomenon as a whole in conjunction with a portrait. If positioned within or in front of a chapel dedicated to the saint in question, as a *proskynetarion* icon,<sup>43</sup> the format would have furnished a pictorial variation on the templon beam. It would have presented a prototypical, recognizable icon of the holy one along with a frame in which he or she constantly changes posture, position, garments, and state of being.

The distinction between the portrait and the narrative scenes is significant, as it reinforces the differences in the saint's ontological status at various sites of the panel. By displaying the scenes as smaller, more restricted compositions compared to the saint's portrait at the center, the *vita* icon exposes the contingency of the prototypical image. The portrait is miniaturized, manipulated, repeated, and maneuvered out of shape to depict the narrative of the holy life. This is a radical move indeed, and one which would have surely impressed viewers and venerationers as such. Ševčenko's analysis shrewdly points out that in some cases the magnified portrait of the saint imitates a pre-existing icon, located at the same site. The *vita* icon of Moses at the Monastery of St. Catherine, for instance, is a close replication of a panel painting depicting Moses located there, just as the sculpted portrait of St. George in the *vita* icon originally from Kastoria, Greece, seems to replicate a giant wooden statue of the saint at the Omorphecclesia church in Kastoria.<sup>44</sup> The frames of both these icons thus literally transform an image that is well-known and established enough in the collective memory to have been replicated – the caveat being that the reproduction is sequentially, and purposefully, wrenched out of shape on its edges. The fact that such a practice was

performed on these prototypical portrait icons indicates the enormous pictorial flexibility perceived to reside in them. The scenes surely held out an invitation to the viewer to rearrange the portrait as necessary as he or she contemplated the trajectory of the saint's life.

Titos Papamastorakis astutely argued that the narrative scenes on the *vita* icons are not arranged randomly across their frames, but are meant to be read sequentially.<sup>45</sup> Where the top and bottom rows are read from left to right, those on the sides flanking the portrait are disposed in a more complex fashion. The viewer must move from the scene on the left to its counterpart on the right, and then back again, in order to apprehend the narrative in the correct sequence. Such a reading might have accompanied the aural declamation of the saint's life on his or her feast day, when the *vita* icon might have been displayed. But, while there is no evidence that a viewer *did* perform such a reading (or any other, for that matter), Papamastorakis's argument introduces a novel dimension to the *vita* icons.

The frame of a Byzantine icon is usually read as an entity in its own right. This is not to negate its relationship with the main body of the icon, which is constant.<sup>46</sup> But even as they refer to the center, the words or the images on the frame are usually not physically displaced on to the surface of the latter but remain on the periphery (*periphēreia* being the literal term for "frame" in Greek).<sup>47</sup> The sequence posited by Papamastorakis, however, suggests a conceptual and physical spilling over of the frame into the panel itself. It forces the hagiographic narrative to include the prototypical portrait of the saint in order to progress in the desired trajectory. This implies a constant interruption in the depiction of the holy being. If read in sequence, he or she appears in reduced, full-length or three-quarters pose on the left edge of the frame, to be transformed into a magnified frontal portrait, to reappear yet again in miniaturized version in yet another scene at the right edge of the panel. The pictorial processes implicit in the menologion manuscripts and icons are thus given full expression on these panels. Indeed, this "aesthetic of interruption," as it were, has been proposed by Ševčenko in her investigation of the liturgy and art of the twelfth century.<sup>48</sup> Examining the *synaxarion* of the Evergetis monastery, she points to the ways in which the services dedicated to the saints (in particular St. Nicholas), feature a rich variety of texts, such as Psalm and Gospel passages, short verses (*troparia*), long canons, and the

saint's life. During the service, the genres cut across each other, alternate, and sometimes "the feast of the saint spreads beyond its proper time frame into the next day, so that its texts interact with those of a quite different saint."<sup>49</sup> Ševčenko suggests that the twelfth century saw the rise of a new aesthetic "favouring juxtaposition, interaction, swift breaks in rhythm and genre, the interlacing of poetry and prose, of large devotional image with small boxed narrative."<sup>50</sup>

The following section analyses a series of *vita* icons in order to reveal the ways in which they engage precisely such an aesthetic. In doing so, the icons each highlight a set of issues pertaining to the icon-prototype relationship and urge the viewer into a consciousness of the variety of roles he or she occupies during the process of viewing. The Eustratios beam discussed in the previous section presents a permutation on Byzantine visuality while ostensibly displaying the afterlife of the saint. The *vita* icons offer a commentary on similar subjects even as they depict the mortal lives of the holy beings on their frames.

### St. Nicholas: Absence and Presence

The *vita* icon of St. Nicholas, located in the Monastery of St. Catherine, ingeniously interprets an episode from the saint's life as the *raison d'être* behind his portrait (Plate VIII). This portrait presides at the center of the panel in the form of Nicholas's bust. Stern and frontal, his strong dark eyebrows arch down and away from the emphatic lines that rise upward, stamped across his forehead. The cross-embossed *omophorion* enfolds Nicholas and signals his status as an ecclesiastic, as does the blunt rectangle of the jeweled Gospel book he holds. The saint is flanked by tiny depictions of Christ and the Theotokos. Christ hands him the Gospel book, and the Theotokos holds out the *omophorion*. The portrait visualizes an episode in Nicholas's *vita*, specifically the *Vita compilata*, in which Christ and the Theotokos appeared to the holy man in a dream, holding the symbols of his ecclesiastical position and validating his vocation as a bishop of the Orthodox Church.<sup>51</sup>

The panel translates a significant moment of Nicholas's biography into the creation of his pictorial identity; Christ and his mother literally furnish the elements that constitute the saint's portrait by handing Nicholas the book he holds and the *omophorion* that he sports. The

insertion of Christ and the Theotokos also cues the viewer to a fundamental theme pervading the episodes depicted on the edges: the appearance of holy figures as visions, or dreams, and the differences between those states of being as mediated by the icon. Indeed, some of the episodes depicted differ from their textual sources in emphasizing the sleeping or waking postures of the protagonists, thus underscoring the differences in the status of the visions they are granted.

The third episode on the right grid depicts Nicholas in front of a man disposed in bed (Fig. 2). The man looks directly at the saint, whose arm is stretched in a gesture of speech. The corresponding scene on the left grid depicts the three soldiers unjustly imprisoned (Fig. 3). Right below this scene, Nicholas appears to yet another man, also displayed in bed. He sports a crown and is identified in the inscription as the emperor (Plate VIII). In the scene across on the right grid, the three prisoners appear in front of a crowned figure – the emperor again – who grants them their freedom (Plate VIII).

This chiasmic arrangement of scenes flanking Nicholas's portrait is important. The two episodes in which the saint appears correspond diagonally. Both are composed of the same elements: Nicholas addressing a man lying in bed against an architectural backdrop. But they also differ in important ways. On the right grid, the saint faces to the right toward a man who stares back, his eyes large and bright (Fig. 2). As remarked by Ševčenko, this upright and awake version of the eparch, Ablabius, is a unique feature in all the depictions of the episode.<sup>52</sup> It stands in contrast to the scene on the left grid, in which the saint gestures to the left to an emperor whose head is averted and whose eyes are mere dark strokes in contrast to Nicholas's (and Ablabius's) wide-eyed gaze. Both depictions of Nicholas are supposed to be visions, but a distinction is made between a waking vision and an apparition in a dream. Ševčenko observes that most of the hagiographies state that Nicholas appeared as a dream to the emperor, although two texts, the *Praxis de Stratelates* and the *Encomium Neophyti*, remark that Nicholas appeared to the emperor in the flesh.<sup>53</sup> On the icon, however, the image shows the emperor while he is asleep, in stark contrast to the depiction of Ablabius. Thus, the viewing stance of the emperor and Ablabius differ, as does the vision granted to each of them, which illustrates a range of modes in which saints could appear to mortals. The status of Nicholas differs in both scenes and is



2. St. Nicholas appearing to the eparch, Ablabius (detail), *vita* icon of St. Nicholas. Courtesy of the Michigan-Princeton-Alexandria Expedition to Mount Sinai.



3. The three soldiers imprisoned (detail), *vita* icon of St. Nicholas. Courtesy of the Michigan-Princeton-Alexandria Expedition to Mount Sinai.

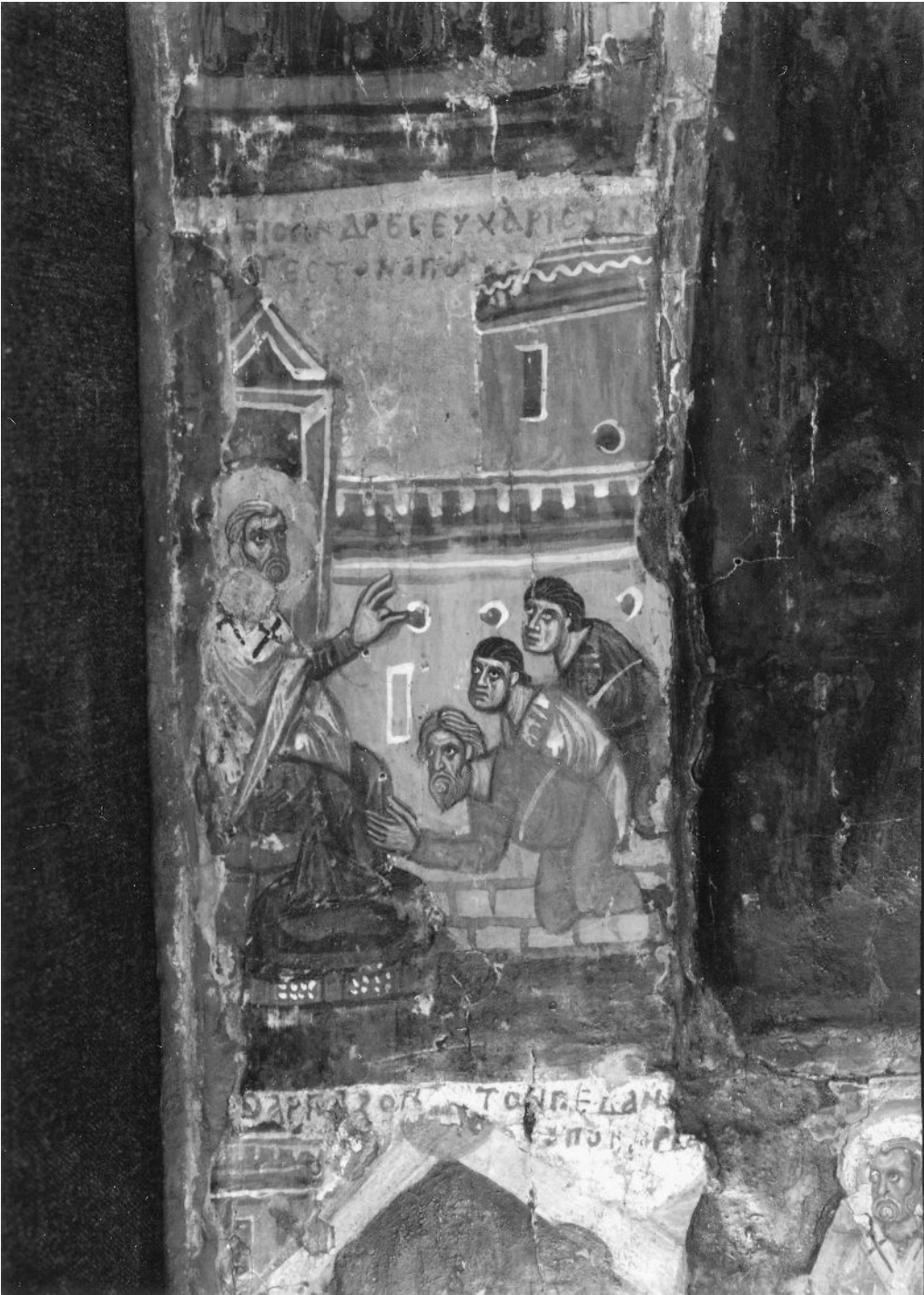
kept deliberately ambiguous. But even as Nicholas's identity shifts, so does the perceptual apparatus of the viewer, who necessarily registers the differences between the emperor's and Ablabius's stances vis-à-vis the saint. The viewer is required to appreciate these differences in the viewing process, each of which yields a particular ontological manifestation of the saint.

Interestingly, the captions accompanying each scene remain relatively equivocal about Nicholas's status. Abbreviated and fragmentary in some cases, the rest simply refer to him as Ο ΑΓΙΟΣ, or "the holy one." They refrain from the proper name of the being in question, implying that the adjective ΑΓΙΟΣ can encompass and signify a variety of states, even in simultaneity. The texts are permitted to retain their ambiguity, while the images bear the burden of conveying the nuances of Nicholas's condition, often by reference to his surroundings and the people he interacts with.

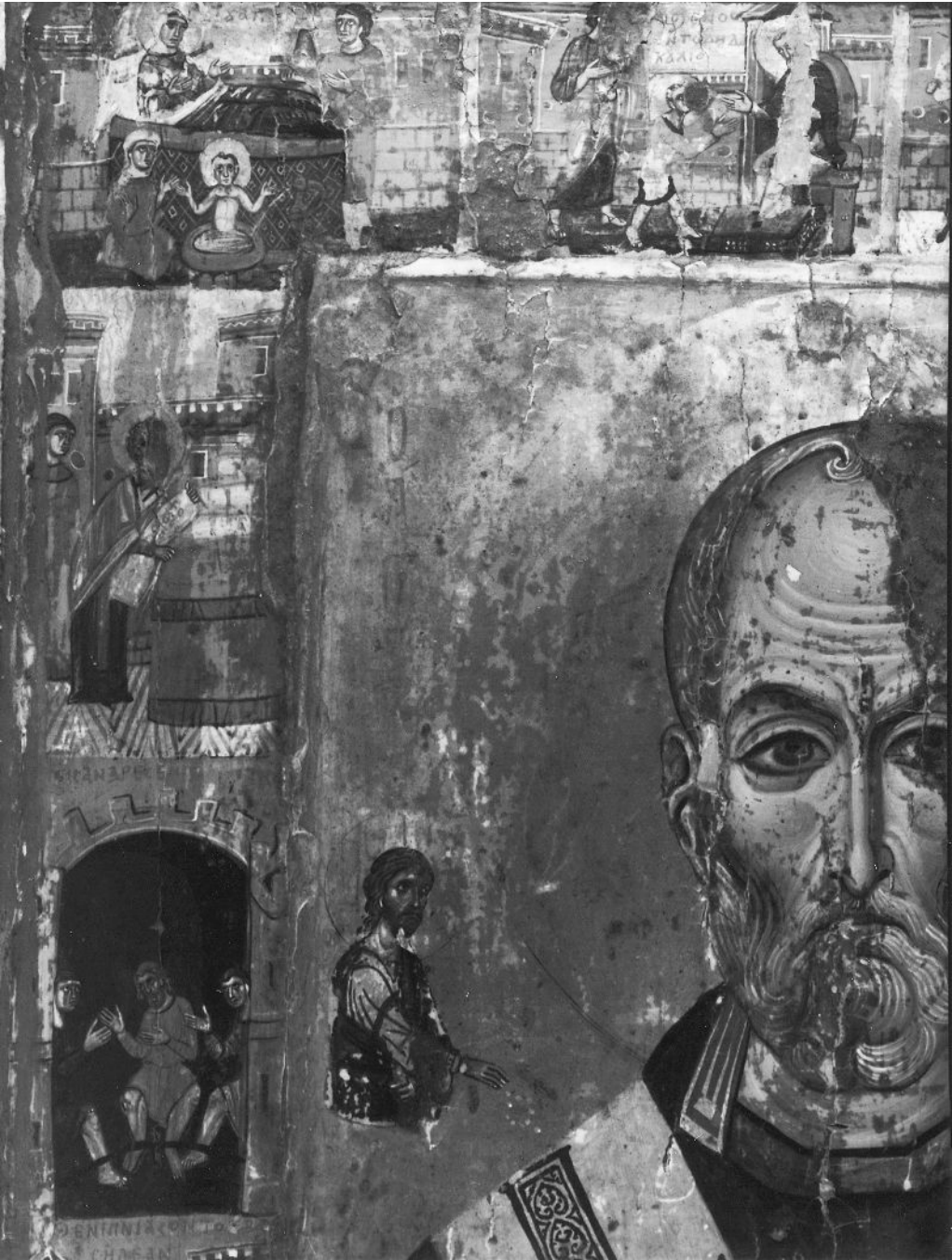
The scene with the three soldiers in prison is conspicuous for the saint's absence (Fig. 3). As discussed earlier, Nicholas is present in the verbal invocations of the soldiers. The caption does not refer to their prayers at all, merely locating "the three men in prison" (ΤΡΙΣ ΑΝΔΡΕΣ ΕΝ ΤΙ ΦΙΛΑΚΙ). But one of them holds out both arms in a gesture implying an address to the saint. Diagonally across is yet another scene in which Nicholas is absent. It depicts the three soldiers in front of the emperor who, after interrogating them (Η ΕΡΩΤΗΣΙΣ ΤΟΥ ΒΑΣΙ[ΛΕΩΣ]), releases them from their bonds. The only scene in which the soldiers enter into a direct encounter with Nicholas is pictured on the left grid, where they kneel in gratitude in front of the saint (Fig. 4). He who answered their prayers now appears – presumably – in the flesh, or is he perhaps a vision? The caption does not help, as it still insists on referring to the saint as Ο ΑΓΙΟΣ. The viewer is thus offered a cadenced sequence of events in which Nicholas oscillates between dream and waking vision, absence and presence, where the occurrence of his figure does not guarantee any one of those states of being.

The most obvious sequence of transitions is figured in the top row of the icon, each episode of which outlines a different stage in Nicholas's life (Fig. 5). The first scene at the left depicts him as an infant who raised himself in the bath. The following scene shows him as a child learning scripture and surpassing himself in the process. In the third scene,





4. The three soldiers thank St. Nicholas (detail), *vita* icon of St. Nicholas. Courtesy of the Michigan-Princeton-Alexandria Expedition to Mount Sinai.



5. *Vita* icon of St. Nicholas, late twelfth to early thirteenth century (detail), Monastery of St. Catherine, Sinai, Egypt. Courtesy of the Michigan-Princeton-Alexandria Expedition to Mount Sinai.



5. (cont.)

Nicholas is ordained a priest. In the fourth scene that closes the sequence at the top right corner, he is ordained a bishop. The critical difference between Nicholas's status as priest and bishop is highlighted by the change in costume and his assumption of the cross-adorned *omophorion*.<sup>54</sup> Thus, the top row introduces the viewer to a series of literal transformations in Nicholas's identity as he grows from infancy to youth to adulthood.

The grids on the left and right depict transitions of a less literal sort. One of the ways in which they tackle the issue of holy presence is, ironically, through an emphasis on absence. In the scene at the top of the right grid Nicholas is depicted in a boat, tossed about on the waves (Fig. 6). Winged demons – perpetrators of the impending shipwreck – hover eerily in the wind as they are expelled by Nicholas's prayers. The visual counterpart of Nicholas's encounter with the demons would be the scene in the opposite grid, just below the top left corner of the panel (Fig. 7). Here the saint is depicted in his role as bishop, celebrating the mysteries. Whereas the scene at the other end displays evil spirits, the scene of Nicholas as bishop works in the reverse and refrains from overt depiction. It does not picture the altar in detail; in fact, the altar table is empty. But the lack of Eucharistic elements does not signify nothingness. Just as Nicholas is present in the soldiers' prayers in the scene below, so too the transformation that occurs at the altar table when wine changes to blood is a given. Nicholas holds a scroll with a partial inscription on it, attesting to the invocations that enable that mystic transformation. The lack of pictorial depiction does not necessarily denote absence.

If these scenes display Nicholas's body in different states and postures even as his identity remains the same, then a scene at the bottom turns this pictorial precept inside out (Fig. 8). The second frame at the bottom left depicts Nicholas in the act of returning a boy kidnapped by the Saracens (pictured in a tent) to his parents. The lad is the figure of importance here. Dressed in a white tunic with a black border hemmed across the bottom, the sleeves, and the collar, the boy resembles almost exactly the figure of Nicholas as a child in the second scene from the left on the top grid of the panel (Fig. 2).<sup>55</sup> Along with their physical features, the details of their dress are identical. Highlighting the similarities is the position of the two lads, whose images are aligned in a near-vertical axis. What is the meaning of this deliberate doubling?



6. St. Nicholas expelling demons at sea (detail), *vita* icon of St. Nicholas. Courtesy of the Michigan-Princeton-Alexandria Expedition to Mount Sinai.



7. St. Nicholas celebrating at the altar (detail), *vita* icon of St. Nicholas. Courtesy of the Michigan-Princeton-Alexandria Expedition to Mount Sinai.



8. St. Nicholas rescues the child Basil from the Saracens (detail), *vita* icon of St. Nicholas. Courtesy of the Michigan-Princeton-Alexandria Expedition to Mount Sinai.

In his *Antirrheticus* against the iconoclasts, Theodore of Stoudios distinguished synonyms from homonyms as markers of the prototype and the representation.<sup>56</sup> A synonym is a word that is interchangeable, or nearly interchangeable, with another. A homonym sounds the same as another word, but its meaning differs from the latter. Theodore applies the sonorous similarities and semantic differences implied in the use of synonyms and homonyms to the prototype-icon relationship. The same name may be used to designate both the prototype and the icon, but in the former the name acts as a synonym, which refers directly to the prototype. In the latter, it is a homonym, which *appears* to refer to the prototype because of its vocal qualities but in fact does not, referring to the representation instead. The capacity of the homonym to refer to two different objects simultaneously brings it into dangerous, if playful, proximity with the pun. In a pun one signifier is attached to two or more signifieds; one word can mean two or more things.<sup>57</sup>

The scenes depicting the two boys on the *vita* icon of St. Nicholas function as a visual pun. Two figures seemingly identical in features and dress are revealed, at a closer look, to be different beings. The figure of Nicholas repeated in the other scenes changes its ontological status from dream to waking vision, from priest to bishop, but each of those states sustains its relationship to a uniform prototype: St. Nicholas. The scenes containing the figures of the youths on either end of the panel interrupt this set of relations by referring to two distinct prototypes: the saint and the kidnapped boy.

Not content with the doubling across the panel, the scene at the bottom displays yet another, more obvious instance of repetition (Fig. 8). It is the only one that jolts the viewer into a succession of rapid encounters with the figure of Nicholas, whereas every other scene allows a brief hiatus before introducing the saint yet again in the succeeding episode. At this particular site, Nicholas is depicted in two adjacent positions. One turns to the left, the other to the right. The former stance refers to his rescue of the boy from the Saracens; although the panel is severely damaged here, the boy was probably depicted along with Nicholas. The second figure depicts the saint again, restoring the boy to his parents. The scenes are not separated by a red border, as in every other case. The double iteration of Nicholas *is* the border, the saint being the transitional device that enables the movement from the Saracens' tent on the left to the lad's home on the right.

Presumably Nicholas's status in these depictions remains the same over the course of the boy's rescue. If the boy, in his turn, were also depicted twice, then the repetitions would be all the more striking for appearing together. This is the unique site of the panel where the figures retain the same literal – and, possibly, ontological – status over two successive depictions. In every other scene, the figure of Nicholas changes its physical form, or state, or disappears, denying a uniform reading of it across adjacent episodes. One might imagine that the double depiction of the saint, so rapidly executed, was intended to facilitate the course of the narrative. In contrast, the brief spaces punctuating the other depictions of Nicholas allow the viewer to comprehend and accommodate the shifts in the holy figure as it changes from one state of being, or situation, or posture, to another.

Indeed, the episodes are designed not only to recount the hagiographic narrative of St. Nicholas but to signify the varied, sometimes



overlapping, identities the saint appeared in during his lifetime. The deliberation with which the scenes are played off against each other is evidence of this. Their innovative nature resides in the simultaneous presentation of each of those states across a single field in which a fixed iconic version of Nicholas looms large over the others.

### St. George: Repetition and Defacement

The *vita* icon of St. George, also located at the Monastery of St. Catherine at Sinai, depicts the saint in his military regalia, full-length and imposing, armed with a lance that cuts across the length of the panel and a shield whose swelling curve spills out of the border on the right (Plate IX).<sup>58</sup> The full-length figure of this saint, as opposed to the bust-length depiction of Nicholas, alludes to the energy and potential mobility of the military saints, who, as a rule, were depicted as more robust and ready for action than their other holy counterparts.<sup>59</sup> George's figure is an amalgam of multiple layers. The tunic with the patterned skirt over it, the cuirass of gold, the plates covering his right arm, the armor enfolded in a cape pinned back with a brooch, the crisscrossed leggings encased in shoes, and a strap from which a sword dangles by his thigh – all these elements come together in one tightly packed ensemble to display the saint as a strapping, beautifully adorned being. The emphasis on ornamentation is evident in the gold highlights that burst across George's figure at intervals, transforming his shield into an object of elegance rather than presenting it as a weapon of aggression. The leggings crossed in a zigzag motif, and the delicate golden line of the shoes that recurs as the floral pattern blossoming around George's feet, all indicate a concern for decoration and the gradual, jigsaw-like building up of the saint's figure, which is integral to its pictorial composition.<sup>60</sup>

My contention is that this heavily layered entity, whose accoutrements strain to exceed the boundaries of the panel, does not merely display a successful warrior saint. It is also a means of enabling the systematic dismantling of the layers that make up George's prototypical image, and of reducing his bulk to smaller, manageable dimensions that can be wrenched apart. Significantly, the portrait icon of the saint is accompanied by a donor, identified in the inscription as one George, the Iberian.<sup>61</sup> He is a miniature being in comparison to the saint. Unlike other

depictions of donors who kneel, or turn toward the holy one in supplication, George the Iberian is almost frontal in stance and returns the viewer's gaze. Like the viewer, he is placed in a position from which he can survey the alterations in St. George's portrait, occurring all around the frame (the importance of this donor's stance will be discussed in comparison to another donor later in this section). Unlike the icon of St. Nicholas, the panel does not present a variety of ontological states through the repetition of a (more or less) uniform iconic matrix of St. George. Instead, the panel manipulates the matrix itself in order to signify its pictorial contingency.

This contingency is expressed through the gradual stripping away and leveling of each of the components constituting the portrait icon. The first scene on the top left corner depicts George giving away his belongings (Fig. 9). He stands erect and fully dressed, but his garments are nowhere as grand or complexly intertwined as those enfolding his



9. St. George giving away his belongings, top row (detail), *vita* icon of St. George. Courtesy of the Michigan-Princeton-Alexandria Expedition to Mount Sinai.



10. St. George being beaten, top row (detail), *vita* icon of St. George. Courtesy of the Michigan-Princeton-Alexandria Expedition to Mount Sinai.

portrait in the center. Unlike the planes of patterned and highlighted cloth evident there, this figure is identified by the broad, unornamented passages of blue and red that color his tunic and cloak. The configuration obtains in most of the scenes, but in a few its starkness is further broken down.

Six scenes depict George in varied states of undress. In some of these, his body is reduced to mere fragments. The fourth scene on the top row depicts the saint being beaten (Fig. 10). He lies on his stomach, his back exposed, streaks of blood pouring out from a series of dotted marks that appear tattoo-like on the surface of his skin. The bruises sustained by George are transformed into a decorative motif across his body. That body, resplendently covered in armor in the portrait icon below, is exposed as a naked vessel, and one whose surface is literally pierced through to allow its blood to drip forth.

Three scenes on the left grid break apart with chilling deliberation the warrior's hitherto intact figure (Fig. 11). The third scene from the top

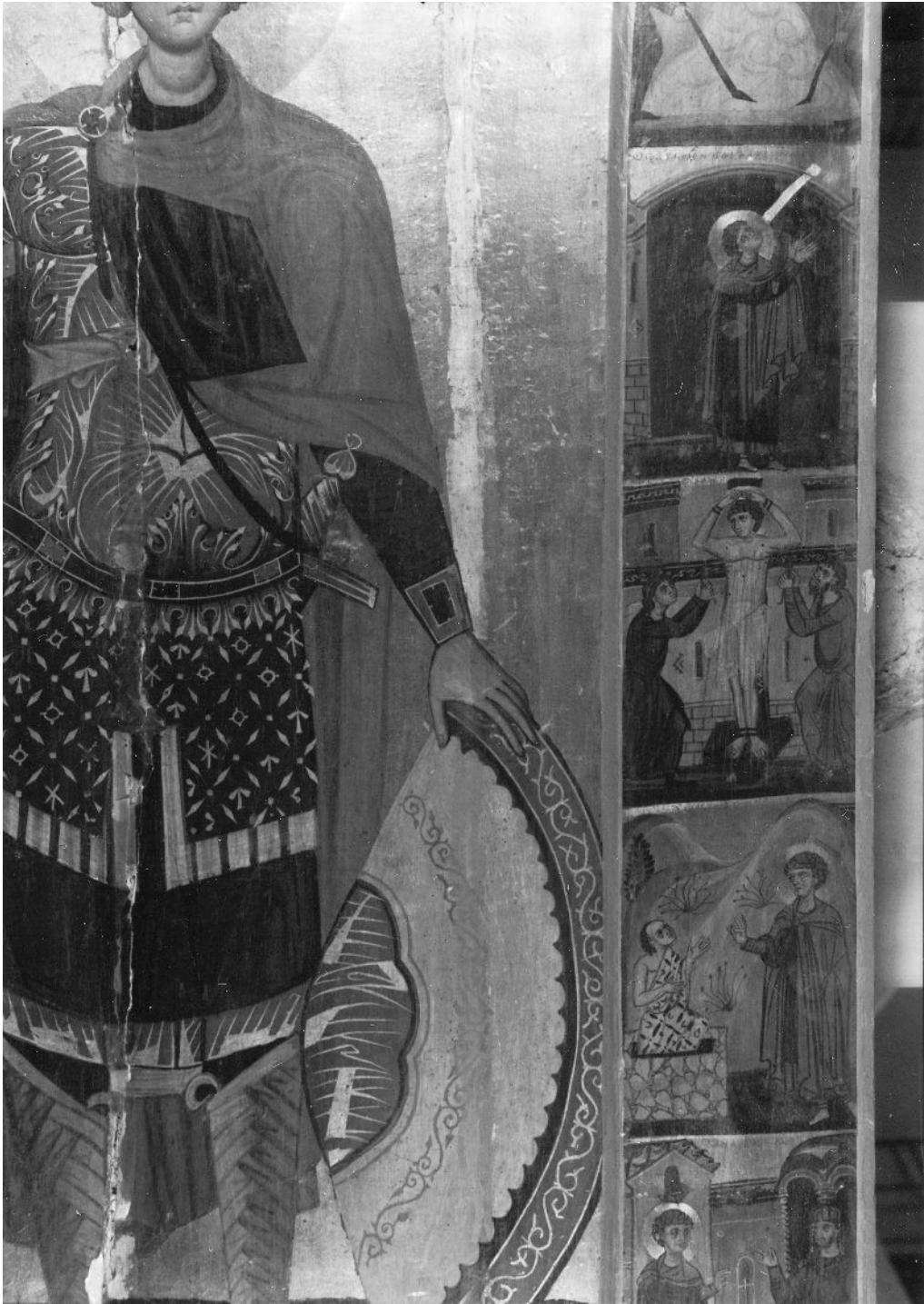


11. St. George's tortures, left grid (detail), *vita* icon of St. George. Courtesy of the Michigan-Princeton-Alexandria Expedition to Mount Sinai.

depicts George naked apart from a flimsy loincloth, bound to a stake. Two men hold flaming torches to his torso and armpit. This is only one of two scenes to depict George in full-frontal near-nudity, sharply contrasting with the icon in the center. The scene below further distorts the stripped icon. Here George appears as a head attached to two arms, while the rest of his body is obscured by the wheel on which he is set. Below this scene the saint faces in the opposite direction, his head, one arm, and a portion of his legs visible beneath a gigantic boulder, chosen to crush him with. The architectural framework consists of a wall flanked by two edifices. The vista recurs in a scene across on the right grid, in which George is bound full-length and naked to a stake in order to be scraped (Fig. 12).

The colors of the edifices alternate from scene to scene down the left grid; they are pale and dark hued in turns from left to right as the tortures progress. The shifts in color, barely noticeable at first glance, are the only indication of a change of location and of the chronological distance separating each of George's trials. It is testimony to the role of ornamentation that underpins the entire panel, extending from the figure of the saint to the surrounding scenes. Moreover, it attests to the contingency of pictorial depiction itself whereby changing a single element, such as color, can transform a prototypical scene and allude to the transformation of identity.

The panel strives to impart this important insight by including a number of scenes that give the impression of repetition. In three scenes, one each on the top row, the left and right grids, George is shown during an interrogation (Plate IX). He is depicted with his right arm extended in a gesture of speech toward a seated man who also holds out an arm, as if engaged in debate. The inscription identifying them is the same: "the saint being interrogated" (Ο α(γιοϛ) διαλεγομενοϛ). Because of the differences in architecture, the viewer realizes that these are three distinct episodes, occurring at different periods in George's life. Similarly, the scenes in which George is "led away" (Ο α(γιοϛ) σιρομενοϛ) occur twice, once each on the top and bottom rows (Plate IX). The colors defining the characters alternate. At the top, George is dressed in blue and red, while the one leading him is in dark robes. At the bottom, George is in blue, now deprived of his cloak, whereas the man grasping his wrist is in



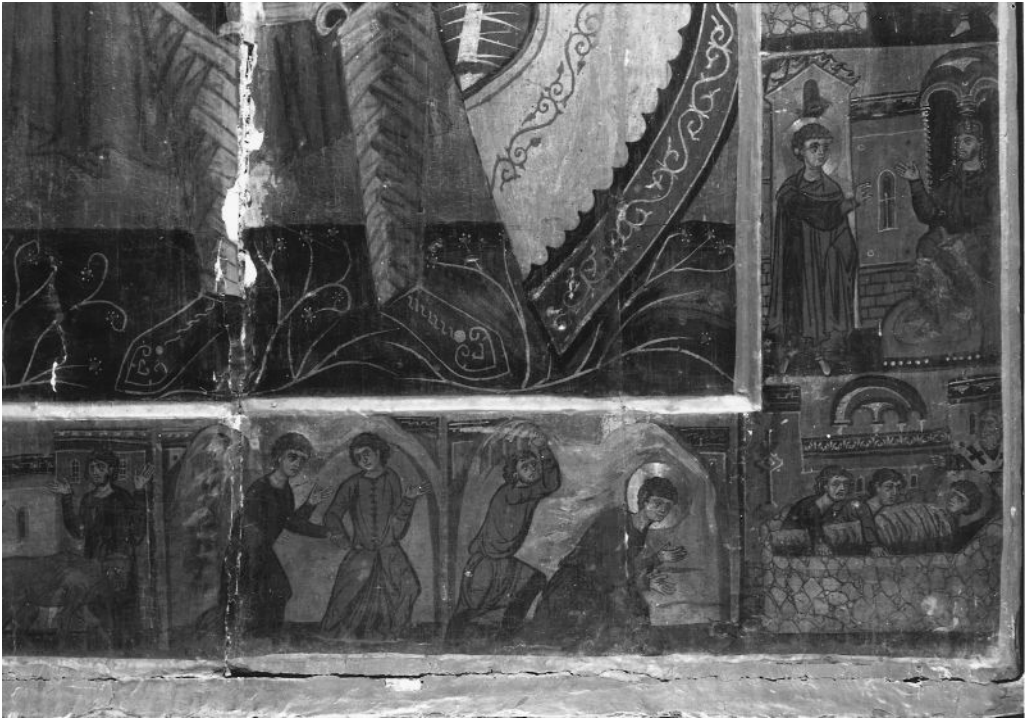
12. St. George being scraped, right grid (detail), *vita* icon of St. George. Courtesy of the Michigan-Princeton-Alexandria Expedition to Mount Sinai.



13. St. George instigating the fall of idols and the resurrection of the ox, bottom row (detail), *vita* icon of St. George. Courtesy of the Michigan-Princeton-Alexandria Expedition to Mount Sinai.

red. Despite the same inscription identifying both, they are clearly two different scenes, the one at the bottom leading to George's death by beheading.

The bottom row expresses Byzantine preoccupations with the definition of an image (Fig. 13). The first scene at the left depicts George instigating the fall of pagan idols. Where his outstretched arm usually signifies a blessing or speech, here it denotes a gesture of destruction. The idol, shown as a figure bent over backward and falling off its pedestal, is of a pale yellow tint.<sup>62</sup> The adjoining scene depicts George resurrecting an ox that stands brown-red and bursting with health (Fig. 13). These images cannot help but recall the episode of the golden calf, itself an idol that Moses had to destroy. The first scene shows a false image, an idol, within the pictorial field of a true image – the icon of St. George. The following scene depicts a live ox, but one that alludes unmistakably by its position on the panel to the prototypical false image – the golden calf.



14. The funeral of St. George, bottom row (detail), *vita* icon of St. George. Courtesy of the Michigan-Princeton-Alexandria Expedition to Mount Sinai.

Although the holy icon was validated in 843, the two scenes reflect the concerns that Byzantine theologians and philosophers, novelists and commentators, were wrestling with well into the twelfth century and beyond, and which find blatant expression in the hagiographic images analyzed in this chapter. They highlight the lingering anxieties of identifying an icon as true or otherwise.

The final scene at bottom right depicts George's funeral (Fig. 14). Here the saint appears in the layers of his prototypical image at the center, but this time his body is wrapped in a plain white shroud whose crisp folds taper down to his feet. Two men kneel over the body, their arms enfolding it as they lay it in its tomb. Their touch is opposed to that of the men who lead George away in the two scenes discussed earlier. In those, the body grasped was that of the human being, susceptible to torture. In the final scene, the body being embraced is a relic.

If the Sinai icon depicts George in a uniform (albeit breakable) ontological state in all but the episode of his funeral, then an icon in Athens



complicates this consistency (Plate X). It displays George in relief at the center of the panel, whereas the narrative scenes are painted in the flanking grids. Glenn Peers argues convincingly that the relief presents George as an entity straddling both human and divine realms, thus reinforcing the expressions of ontological complexity that the *vita* format enables.<sup>63</sup> George's muscular legs and feet overstep the icon's lower boundary into the viewer's space, whereas his upper body, carved in shallow relief, turns away from the viewer toward a tiny, painted depiction of Christ in the top right corner. Peers further suggests that George's suffering body in the painted scenes is reconstituted and made whole (the wholeness underscored by the three-dimensional medium of relief) at the center of the panel.

I would argue that along with the blurring of George's temporal identities, the icon confounds the very definition of his – and by extension, of any – prototypical image of a saint. The three-quarters pose of the relief contrasts sharply with the full-length, painted version of George in three flanking scenes. In these the saint is displayed frontally, bound to a stake, naked except for a loincloth, his arms pinned above or stretched out on either side in a manner reminiscent of Christ's crucifixion. It is also surely significant that in each scene in which George is shown stripped and frontal, his figure is positioned in the middle of the episode, whereas in the scenes that show the saint clothed, his figure is invariably nudged slightly off center. These differences further underline the inversions of center and frame, and the clothed figure which is sidelined versus the naked body that confronts the viewer head-on. Is George's "true" portrait icon the version depicted in relief, in which he is clothed and turns away from the viewer? Or is it the frontal, near-naked, painted version, since Byzantine portraits are more often than not frontal? Do the saint's protruding feet invite viewer interaction as they obtrude into the latter's space from the center, or does the saint's intense stare in the episodes on the sides invite an answering impulse? The fact that one can respond positively to each of these questions only serves to destabilize the prevalent hierarchies of center and frame, and of the prototypical icon and its variations.

Significantly, the top grid of the Athens panel does not depict scenes from George's life, but displays an expanded version of the Hetoimasia. Denoting the prepared throne, the Hetoimasia can signify multiple

events, from Christ's Passion to his Second Coming.<sup>64</sup> What the viewer registers in each case is an empty throne, waiting to be filled. The center of this *vita* icon, then, depicts an axis composed of degrees of absence. It displays an unoccupied space at its very top, flanked by attending angels. This absence is succeeded by a warrior saint who turns away from the viewer to the side where Christ appears. Presence – or an image that responds to the viewer's gaze – seems to be located on the flanks. The robust nature of the relief icon at the center does not mitigate the impression of a saint who is not entirely there for the viewer. Indeed, the latter's exclusion is accentuated by the donor figure (the viewer's approximate) who kneels behind George, and who is afforded a view of the saint's back while that venerable being turns elsewhere. (In contrast, George the Iberian on the Sinai *vita* icon shares the same visual field as the saint, and is not deprived of George's frontal view but replicates it.) Nancy Ševčenko has argued that George's turning away from the donor depicts him in the act of transmitting the donor's prayers to Christ; the saint turns to the figure to whom he is, after all, subordinate.<sup>65</sup> Even if this were the case, it still represents a hiatus, one that in its rhythms of deferred and deflected attention serves only to strengthen the paradoxes animating the entire image. The donor figure, the angels, and the panel's viewer all assume the same condition of attendance upon a holy figure that is yet to manifest itself fully.

Both *vita* icons of St. George, therefore, outline startling juxtapositions on their surfaces. The Sinai panel combines a set of scenes of the brutal defacement of the saint's prototypical image with those in which the holy figure is repeated in an almost similar stance in near similar surroundings. In each of these depictions George's status remains the same; that is, he is depicted during his lifetime as an entity of flesh and blood, capable of submitting to torture, but not succumbing until the moment of his final execution. In this respect, the panel differs from the *vita* icon of St. Nicholas. In it, Nicholas's image conforms to the prototypical icon at the center; yet Nicholas's identity changes across the grids. The point of both the *vita* panels of George, on the other hand, is that even in depicting a uniform ontological state, the pictorial code defining a saint must suffer some distortion, even beyond recognition if need be. The Sinai panel proves that the prototypical icon is *capable* of being unpacked and defaced. The Athens icon goes further in complicating

the very definition of the prototypical image by denying the viewer complete access to the saint depicted at its center.

### St. John the Baptist: The Icon and the Relic

John the Baptist is one of the rare saints in Byzantine art to be depicted as both an icon and a relic in close proximity in the same pictorial field. The peculiar hagiography of this saint urges the viewer to grant equal attention to both states of being.<sup>66</sup> A panel dated to the thirteenth century graphically attests to this (Plate XI).<sup>67</sup> The Baptist stands in profile, turned away from the viewer to the right toward a diminutive figure of Christ. Directly below Christ stands a block of stone supporting a paten, which in turn holds the Baptist's severed head. Three roundels on the top edge of the frame recount episodes from the Baptist's life. The one at the left depicts the angel prophesying his birth to Zacharias; the middle roundel depicts the Baptism of Christ; and the third at the top right depicts the birth of the Baptist.

This last scene is aligned with the Baptist's severed head at the bottom right of the panel. At the top we see the bust of the infant as he is immersed in a bath. Directly below this scene is an architectural frame. From a niche in the right emerges Christ, one hand stretched in blessing and the other clutching a scroll. The architecture frames the profile figure of the Baptist with his unfurled scroll (presented frontally) and the paten containing his head. In the golden surface above that head is inscribed a plea:

You see what they do, O Word of God; those who do not bear the refutations of their own darkness. For, behold, they cover this head of mine in the earth, having cut it off with a sword. But since you have returned it from its hidden place, into the light by means which you know, so I beg you preserve those in life, who reverence my venerable icon.

The vertical axis forged by the depiction of the Baptist's birth, the text, and the severed head is richly suggestive. The transformation of the infant's body at the top into a bearded head at the bottom hints at the episodes and transitions between those two stages in the Baptist's life. The scenes are also linked by the motif that underpins the saint's

identity: the baptismal font. A frontal view of the bath, similar to the font, is afforded in the roundel at the top, where it obscures all but the infant's bust. This object resembles a chalice, thus alluding to the Messiah and his subsequent sacrifice as much as to the Baptist's own horrific martyrdom to come. The decapitated head at the bottom fulfills the image at the top. Just as the Baptist is the Forerunner, or the prefiguration fulfilled by Christ, so too the chalice is succeeded by the paten, which displays the Baptist's own second baptism by the sword. The infant in the bath/chalice and the head on the plate/paten are thus bound in a typological relationship, underscored by their being placed in the same axis.

The inscription complicates the notion of the relic, pushed (literally) to the foreground of the panel. Annemarie Weyl Carr has shown how the severed head is presented as part of the intact body of the Baptist standing by it and, in the process, becomes an icon in its own right.<sup>68</sup> This is intimated no less by the inscription, the final line of which asks that the viewer revere the *icon* of the Baptist. This reading of the image is arresting, and I would venture to add yet another layer to its juxtaposition of the whole and the part, the body and its separated member. I suggest that the relic not only urges awareness of the fact that it is, ultimately, a representation, but that in its depiction as a relic it sustains at least two distinct ontologies. The inscription alerts the viewer to the head's idiosyncratic history, unique from that of the Baptist's body. By referring to the head that was initially buried under the earth, the inscription alludes to the organ capriciously demanded by Herodias and Salome. By referring to the head's coming "into the light," the inscription refers to its *subsequent* status as relic – that is, a fragment properly revered for its holiness. A distinction is drawn between the head as it appeared to the wicked ones who buried it "in darkness" and the relic that it becomes after it is unearthed and brought "into the light."

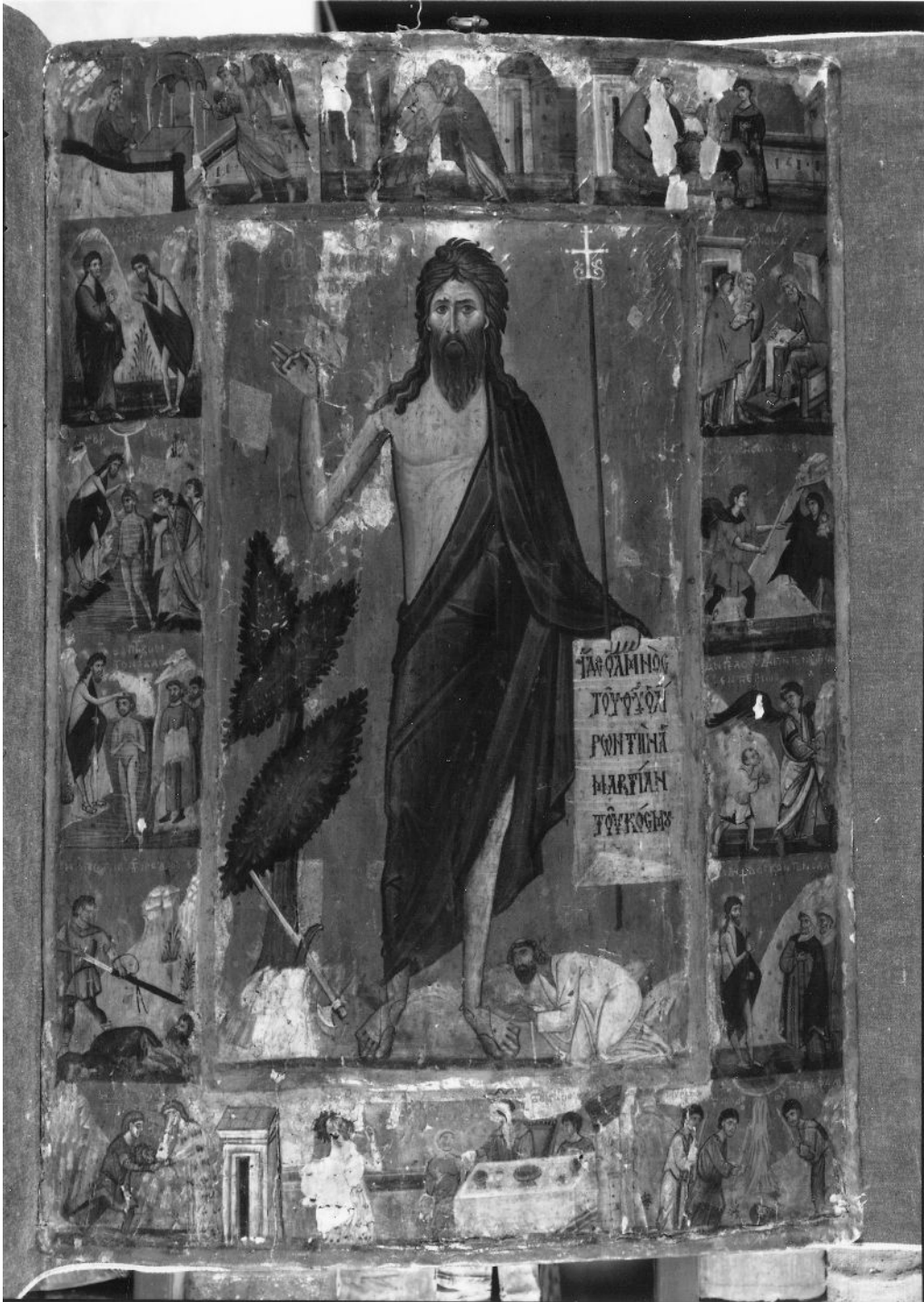
Carr has explored the connotations of baptism encapsulated in the metaphor of "coming into the light."<sup>69</sup> I maintain that the metaphor refers not merely to the Baptist's second baptism by the sword but also to the process by which a body, or body part, assumes its status as a relic. This move is decidedly different from that on the other *vita* icons discussed earlier, which explore the diverse ontological conditions that an icon could express, the relic being the (implicit) final state and the end

point of the narrative cycle. The icons of John the Baptist, in contrast, proffer a meditation on the range of definitions that a *relic* could sustain. In so doing, they also ruminate on the efficacy of speech and silence, the written word and its painted counterpart.

This is evident in the *vita* icon of John the Baptist, located at the Monastery of St. Catherine at Sinai (Fig. 15).<sup>70</sup> The first episode at the top of the right grid depicts the Baptist's father, Zacharias, who writes his son's name on a tablet when he is deprived of speech for his lack of faith. The inscription on the tablet – a written attestation – gives way in the center to a dramatic, full-length (if suitably attenuated) portrait of the Baptist himself, his dark hair disheveled, his beard straggling and unkempt, and his expression fierce. But despite the intensity of the Baptist's stare, the viewer's gaze is destined to be deflected away from it. The inscription on the scroll in the Baptist's left hand commands its audience to "Behold the lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world." The Baptist's right hand points to the first scene on the left grid, which depicts the "lamb of God" in his human form. There, the Baptist bows to Christ (Fig. 16). The inscription accompanying this episode is a direct speech addressed by the Forerunner to the Messiah, "I must be baptized by you" (Matthew 3:13–15), when John refuses to baptize Jesus, requesting the latter to baptize him instead. (Jesus, however, persuades the Baptist to do his duty by his Messiah and is shown being baptized by the Forerunner in the scene directly below.)

Verbal and visual knowledge are conflated in the three scenes across a horizontal axis, which underscores shifting modalities of communication. Starting with Zacharias's written endorsement of the Baptist's name, it moves thence to the Baptist's spoken/written and visual announcement of the advent of the Lamb of God. Despite its forceful delineation, the Baptist's icon turns attention away from itself to a flanking scene and to the figure that fulfills its – and the Baptist's – own ontological potential: Christ. The axis terminates on the left grid where Christ speaks to the Baptist and asserts the latter's importance, thus reverting viewer attention back to the figure the panel is dedicated to.

Interestingly, the panel devotes quite as much attention to the ontological states of Christ as it does to the Baptist. Apart from the textual allusion to the "lamb of God," Christ is depicted twice, before and during



15. *Vita* icon of St. John the Baptist, late twelfth to early thirteenth century, Monastery of St. Catherine, Sinai, Egypt. Courtesy of the Michigan-Princeton-Alexandria Expedition to Mount Sinai.



16. "I must be baptized by you," the Baptist bowing to Christ (detail), *vita* icon of St. John the Baptist. Courtesy of the Michigan-Princeton-Alexandria Expedition to Mount Sinai.

the Baptism, each of those conditions being distinct from the other (Figs. 16 and 17). This is also the case with the crowds that John baptizes, who in the process of baptism leave behind their former selves and identities for a Christian mode of life. But the most startling, indeed gruesome, transformations on the panel are reserved for the Forerunner himself. The scene above the bottom of the left grid depicts the aftermath of the decapitation, with John's head severed from his body, scarlet strands of blood dripping from it (Fig. 18). The body is an ungainly trunk, grotesque and bulkier than the lanky figure towering at the center of the panel. Just as St. George's icon suffered singular distortions in successive episodes, the Baptist's icon is violently sundered. But the creativity of the series of tortures inflicted on George is not in evidence here. The Baptist's body instantly disappears from view whereas his head forms the dominant motif of the entire bottom row of the panel.

The first scene at the bottom left depicts the head's advent into Herod's court (Fig. 19). This establishes the iconic formula – the prototypical image, if you will – of the Baptist's avatar after death. It is the first stage in the process that will culminate in the head becoming a relic. The next scene, a spatially extended elaboration of the head's reception at court, requires some discussion (Fig. 20). It corresponds to the scene in the top grid where Zacharias and Elizabeth embrace in joyful anticipation of the Baptist's birth, his imminent presence (Fig. 21). Right below looms the Baptist in his full form; the fruit of that embrace (Fig. 15). Below him is Herod's court. The Baptist's figure is radically broken now; his head appears at the far left with an abraded figure of Salome (Fig. 20). The Baptist's head is supported by a female form in transparent robes with tassels, one arm prominently holding it aloft. The composition appears to place the head squarely on that of the woman's (presumably Salome's) voluptuous body, thus forming an emphatic contrast to the ascetic figure right above them. The final scene depicts the Baptist's head once again, resting on the earth. Three men with tapers surround it, alluding to its "unearthing" (Fig. 22).

The bottom row of this *vita* icon unveils the stages by which a body part finally becomes a venerated fragment in its own right. The first two scenes display the Baptist's head in conjunction with hands, and the second scene, with a platter that resembles – but is decidedly not – a paten. This visual pun is misleading, as it can trick a viewer into believing

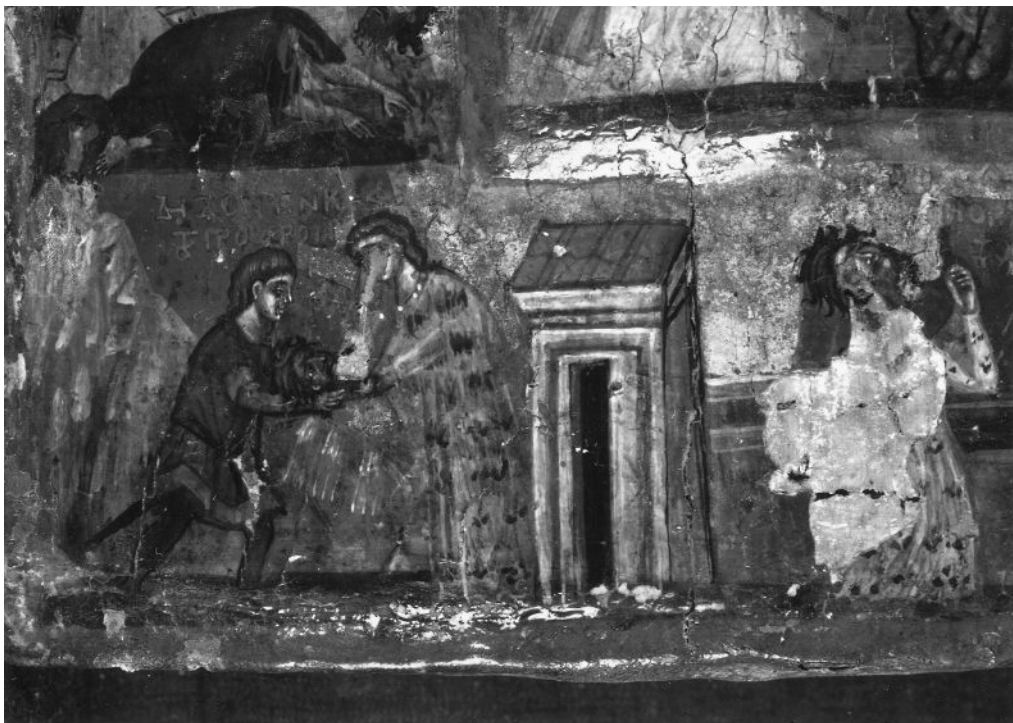




17. The Baptist baptizing Christ (detail), *vita* icon of St. John the Baptist. Courtesy of the Michigan-Princeton-Alexandria Expedition to Mount Sinai.



18. The beheading of the Baptist (detail), *vita* icon of St. John the Baptist. Courtesy of the Michigan-Princeton-Alexandria Expedition to Mount Sinai.



19. The Baptist's head being borne to Herod's court (detail), *vita* icon of St. John the Baptist. Courtesy of the Michigan-Princeton-Alexandria Expedition to Mount Sinai.



20. The diabolical dance at Herod's court (detail), *vita* icon of St. John the Baptist. Courtesy of the Michigan-Princeton-Alexandria Expedition to Mount Sinai.



21. Elizabeth and Zacharias embrace (detail), *vita* icon of St. John the Baptist. Courtesy of the Michigan-Princeton-Alexandria Expedition to Mount Sinai.



22. The Baptist's head unearthed (detail), *vita* icon of St. John the Baptist. Courtesy of the Michigan-Princeton-Alexandria Expedition to Mount Sinai.

that the head is indeed being revered as the relic that it later became. In both scenes, the head is carried aloft by a person, or people, which dilutes its integrity. The second scene, for instance, pairs the ascetic's head with the body of a lewd woman, forming a grotesque figure in the bargain. It is only in the final scene that the head is severed from its associations with the platter, bearers (men and women), and Herod's court. The red stream of paint that now pours down on it is similar to the stream of light gushing out from heaven on Christ in the scene of his Baptism (Fig. 17), thus signaling a decisive change in the head's status. Excavated from the depths of the earth, this is the moment when it assumes its role as an individual player in the hagiography of the Baptist as a holy relic.

### Conclusion

Notwithstanding the emergence and the reasonable popularity of the *vita* image, the format seems to have flourished mainly in certain parts of the Mediterranean, such as Sinai, Cyprus, and areas in Greece. No known examples survive from the capital of the Byzantine Empire. In evaluating the evidence, Ševčenko suggests that scholars look for the development – and possibly even the origins – of the *vita* format in the Mediterranean, particularly in the multiethnic, multilingual context of the Monastery of St. Catherine at Sinai. Furthermore, Ševčenko proposes that these icons furnished a “new form of *vita* expressly designed to be understood by the diverse groups that constituted this society.”<sup>71</sup>

While this is certainly a possibility, given that some scholars believe the Monastery of St. Catherine to have housed ateliers in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries,<sup>72</sup> it must be kept in mind that this specific site was as liable to receive icons as gifts as it was to produce them. But even if artists at the monastery did happen to craft the *vita* icons currently located there, that does not necessarily mean that the icons should have catered only to the needs of a broad audience with varied religious and ethnic affiliations, and that the format was harnessed purely in order to transmit the salient features of the holy lives they depict. As I have shown in this chapter, the *vita* icon sketched out some of the essential components of a saint's life in a deliberately self-reflexive fashion, now repeating, now drastically altering the pictorial matrix of the holy one, and sometimes even attempting to confound his or her physical identity.

These moves were surely not naively executed, but were intended to generate meaning. Moreover, these meanings did not necessarily require a high level of erudition on the part of the audience; rather, they were expected to emerge from the normative practices guiding the reading and contemplation of saints' lives and had already been cultivated in the verbal and visual depictions of saints prior to the rise of the *vita* icons.

However, it is worthwhile speculating on the reasons why the format might have been deemed particularly attractive in a monastic context, such as that prevalent at Sinai. Are there specific features embedded in the *vita* icon that make it an especially appropriate vehicle for the viewing practices of monks? I would argue that there are. The ability to distinguish between varied states of being was integral to monastic meditation. From Evagrius in the fourth century to John of Damascus in the eighth, Niketas Stethatos in the eleventh and Nicholas Kabasilas in the fourteenth century, monastic treatises exhort their readers to distinguish between images in different kinds of dreams, and those in visions and fantasies.<sup>73</sup> A leitmotif in these texts is the receptivity of the mortal senses to the images conjured up by evil spirits, and ways to vanquish and replace them with good, "true" images – often with the aim of ascending to an entirely imageless meditative state. Gregory of Sinai in the thirteenth century, for instance, recommends a sharpened degree of cognition that would enable the monk to recognize the kind of object presented to his mind and, correspondingly, the kind of demon that might have perpetrated it.<sup>74</sup> Images, therefore, were perceived not only to contain pointers to the ontological status of the saints but also to be a means of categorizing the apprentices of the devil. But Gregory is careful to assert that certain mental activities leading to visualization can also be triggered off by angelic powers, thus claiming that the right kinds of images are to be given free rein by the monastic intellect and imagination. The *vita* icon, as this entire chapter has attempted to show, proffers precisely such an opportunity to a monastic and lay audience alike. But it is, perhaps, even more fitting for monks, as it harnesses a series of potential forms that a saint could assume. In the process, it might have served as a visual aid to monks to be on the alert not only to recognize those forms but also to be able to distinguish them from each other, and from their demonic counterparts – a vital task.

But for all its effective brevity, the *vita* icon was short-lived in Byzantium. Nancy Ševčenko has rightly stated that the icons make a brief appearance in the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries and then vanish without warning.<sup>75</sup> In the fourteenth century, a few icons of Christ and the Theotokos are cast in the *vita* format, but with significant differences. The episodes punctuating the frames of these icons are not laid out in successive units, each adjoining the next, as on the earlier examples depicting the saints. Instead, the scenes are carefully separated from each other by ornamental expanses. The impression of an icon mutating – or, conversely, remaining the same – in successive iterations is negated. Thus, the drastic distortions of the saints' portraits explored in this chapter are avoided in the images of Christ and the Theotokos. However, the tremendous pictorial reflexivity of the format is still evident, particularly in the fourteenth-century icon of the Mandylyon, or the Holy Face. Studies have revealed the ways in which the complex questions regarding manufacture, repetition, and icon-prototype bonds are sharpened, even magnified, when the Holy Face is displayed in the format of the *vita* icon, even when the episodes on the frame are separated from each other.<sup>76</sup>

One wonders why the format as it was used for the display of the saints might have suddenly lost its appeal, despite the fact that it was a remarkably useful agent in educating the laity in hagiography. What (other than the ravages of time, which could have destroyed several examples from surviving into our era) might have detracted from its popularity? I suggest that the answer is to be sought in the very discursive strengths of its idiom.

The practice of depicting repeated figures of the saints was discontinued after Iconoclasm, as shown by Henry Maguire, since it was believed to draw on the talismanic effects of pagan magic.<sup>77</sup> The narrative mode as it was visualized on the *vita* icon could have been equally unsettling for related reasons. The effort to establish a set of characteristics for each saint in the Orthodox calendar met the need for a prototypical icon to define and identify each individual holy person. His or her icon, along with the inscription naming it, was believed to sustain a formal relationship to the prototype. The *vita* icon manipulates this set of formal characteristics, altering it, punning on it, and even destroying it. In the process, the format confounds and blurs the core relationships

forged between the portrait and its subject. It makes explicit what the preceding icons of saints only hint at; therein lie both its astonishing creativity and its weakness.

But even as the life of the *vita* icon for the depiction of saints came to an abrupt end within Byzantium (but continued in the post-Byzantine era), it flourished in Rus' and the Balkans. In those regions, it was used to depict not just saints but also statesmen who were elevated to the status of holy beings. The most sustained and imaginative use of the format, however, is evident in the Latin West. It is in Italy that the *vita* panel was used most vigorously and repeatedly, in order to depict one of the most powerfully charismatic personalities of the Roman Catholic Church and the medieval world: St. Francis of Assisi. Why the *vita* image, above other image types, should have been deemed most appropriate for the representation of the *alter Christus* is the subject of the following chapters.



## CHAPTER THREE

### “WROUGHT BY THE FINGER OF GOD”

#### The Transparent and Opaque Saint

The textual lives of Francis of Assisi are replete with instances of the saint’s penchant for literal interpretation. Blessed with a dream in which his house was filled with weapons, Francis took it as a sign to join a military expedition.<sup>1</sup> Enjoined by the crucifix of S. Damiano to “build the house of God, which lay in ruins,” he rebuilt with bricks and mortar the crumbling church in which the pronouncement was made.<sup>2</sup> The Rule of the Order of the Friars Minor drawn up by Francis so sternly adhered to the letter of the Gospel that the pope was justly concerned the friars would not be able to follow it.<sup>3</sup>

The crowning episode of Francis’s biographies is also the most stunningly literal (if unwittingly caused) event in it: following the vision of a seraph bound to a cross, he found himself, in turn, marked with Christ’s stigmata.<sup>4</sup> In sustaining this transformation, Francis not only proved himself a worthy imitator of Christ in the flesh, and not just in spirit; he also became the exemplar of a peculiarly affective mode of viewing whereby the object seen imprints its characteristics upon the one looking at it. The responsiveness of Francis’s body attests to its heightened transparency; like parchment absorbing the imprint of a seal, the body absorbed the wounds of the creature who shone down upon the bewildered, if ecstatic, saint. Soft flesh received the touch of a “wonderful seal of lead.”<sup>5</sup> Francis’s vow to follow Christ came literally – and shockingly – true.

And yet the trajectory of Francis’s life as described by his biographers often belies this leitmotif of literal transparency. Even as Thomas of

Celano, Julian of Speyer, the “Three Companions,” and Bonaventure of Bagnoregio each laud Francis as one who practiced the total renunciation of goods and self, withholding nothing from the world, they also report episodes that highlight the saint’s reticence in various arenas of his life – a preference for secrecy, which undercuts his (seemingly) habitual literalism. This is most evident in accounts of the stigmatization in which Francis’s body, open and susceptible to the seraph, is presented as stubbornly opaque and closed to the mortal world after it receives its wounds.

The stigmatization emblemizes the central paradox intrinsic to any depiction of Francis in text or image: the stigmata are signs that must be explicated, described, and justified as true, without ever being disclosed. Preserved as a secret during Francis’s lifetime (fiercely guarded according to the early biographies but exposed in degrees in the later ones), the writers and painters engaged in representing Francis are perforce drawn into an exercise of alternate revelation and concealment – of the description of Christ’s wounds impressed on the saint, and assertions that those wounds were never completely visible or explicable. Most hagiographic literature, to be sure, protests its inability to capture the sacred essence of its subject, but the difficulties Franciscan hagiographers faced were of a different tenor altogether. For them, the problem at hand was not the perennial one of compressing the magnitude of the *alter Christus*’s charisma into words (and bemoaning the unbridgable gap between the holy subject and its representation, in the process). The challenge in this case was the depiction of the stigmata as the all too concrete, material entities that they were *along* with their profoundly enigmatic nature.

This chapter performs a close reading of a selection of duecento hagiographies, liturgical songs, sermons, and poems dedicated to Francis in order to highlight the difficulties their writers faced in representing the unique nature of their subject. Where previous studies have explored the curious nature of Francis’s vision (the Old Testament associations of the seraph, its Eucharistic connotations, and whether the crucified man was Jesus Christ or not),<sup>6</sup> this chapter draws attention to the rhetorical descriptions of the wounds themselves. How were those unprecedented marks, and the unprecedented event that caused them, captured in words by Francis’s contemporaries? How was a phenomenon deemed so audacious, and yet so secret, transmitted by the *alter Christus*’s

friends, followers, and associates, some of whom apparently never saw the stigmata?

It is significant that the texts consistently use metaphors of image making to describe the stigmatization and its effects. Drawing, sealing, setting, and sculpting furnish the analogies to the action performed by the seraph. This chapter contends that these metaphors enable an ekphrastic appreciation of the stigmata, even as they complicate certain fundamental elements regarding them. For one, the relationship between the wounds and the saint’s body, or the surfaces on which they occur, is never clearly enunciated; the most lucid description harbors important ambiguities. Second, the stigmata shift from being designated as signifiers of nails (registered as “marks” on Francis) to the signified, or the nails themselves, often within the space of the same text. Indeed, the vocabulary employed in each account only increases the tension between those two states of being. Third, the most common analogy to the phenomenon of the stigmata is the act of sealing. But the contexts in which the “divine” sealing of Francis takes place problematizes the conceptual and performative resonance of the medieval seal. In doing all of this, the Franciscan literature of the first half of the duecento evinces a measure of difficulty in circumscribing and transmitting the nature of Francis’s physical being. Consequently, the attentive reader encounters in these texts the tangled skeins that bind the holy subject and its depiction, the image and the medium, and words and images together.

These relationships, moreover, were not merely the province of our writers, or the abstract ruminations of medieval philosophers. Similar issues were pondered over in legal treatises of the duecento, whereby the materials of written and pictorial products and their contents, the surface and its ornamentation (or flesh and wounds), were roped into questions regarding property and ownership. Because there is some debate in our texts as to whether the stigmata were formed of Francis’s own flesh, or whether they were imprinted by an external hand, the legal dilemmas assume a vivid urgency in the Franciscan discourse. Furthermore, the increasing importance accorded to the notion of the “witness” by the Roman curia was yet another legal pressure the Franciscans had to navigate in their depiction of the momentous phenomenon suffered by their founder – an episode that occurred with no

eyewitnesses present, and the results of which were carefully concealed, at least according to the early Franciscan literature. A close examination of descriptions of the stigmata, therefore, yields glimpses into the intersection of artistic concepts and practices with legal jurisdiction, of the competing faculties of sight and touch, and of mystical revelation conforming to the empirical turn of the early decades of the thirteenth century.

Ultimately, this chapter posits that Francis's stigmatization pushed the ethics of mimesis to their very limits. By mimesis in this context, specifically, I refer to the tenacious medieval practice of the imitation of Christ and the desire to comprehend him, even *become* him, which was by no means conceived of as a simple or uniform act. Mimetic practice was grounded in the "hermeneutics of empathy" as formulated by Karl F. Morrison, or the power of identifying oneself mentally with the object of contemplation.<sup>7</sup> Giles Constable has shown how in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, mimetic identification focused upon a close and literal imitation of Christ's suffering body.<sup>8</sup> Francis of Assisi was the most authentic in a sea of such literal imitators, and the first whose wounds were perceived to have been inflicted by "God's finger," and not by his own hand. The writers and artists charged with depicting Francis had to represent the saint while desisting from any signs of having reproduced that divine gesture. In other words, they undertook the difficult negotiation between their own powers of representation (or mimesis) and the divine signing of Francis's body.

The following sections explore the (sometimes contradictory) associations and metaphors deployed in texts about the "divine signing" in three periods: the 1230s immediately following Francis's death; the 1240s, when some of the earlier texts are revised in significant ways; and the early years of the 1260s, which saw Bonaventure of Bagnoregio's definitive biography of Francis with certain themes preserved and others expunged. In the process, the stigmata themselves are transformed from text to text and decade to decade. Each account discloses a concern with describing the wounds in a manner that conveys their tangible immediacy, while simultaneously preserving their mystery. In the process, the texts (like the Byzantine hagiographies) reveal a sustained examination of the themes of representation and viewership as they applied to the specific case of the *alter Christus*.

### The *Vita Prima*: Legal Conundrums

In the first biography of Francis officially endorsed by the papacy – *The Life of Saint Francis*, or the *Vita Prima* by Thomas of Celano, composed in 1228–9 – Thomas elaborates on the episode of the stigmatization with great gusto and no little prurience. After describing Francis’s vision of the seraph on the mountain of La Verna, Thomas states:

Signs of the nails began to appear on his hands and feet, just as he had seen them a little while earlier on the crucified man hovering over him.

His hands and feet seemed to be pierced through the middle by nails, with the heads of the nails appearing on the inner part of his hands and on the upper part of his feet, and their points protruding on opposite sides. Those marks on the inside of his hands were round, but rather oblong on the outside; and small pieces of flesh were visible like the points of nails, bent over and flattened, extending beyond the flesh around them. On his feet, the marks of nails were stamped in the same way and raised above the surrounding flesh. His right side was marked with an oblong scar, as if pierced with a lance, and this often dripped blood, so that his tunic and undergarments were frequently stained with his holy blood. (*FAED* 1, 264).

*. . . coeperunt in manibus eius et pedibus apparere signa clavorum, quemadmodum paulo ante virum supra se viderat crucifixum.*

*Manus et pedes eius in ipso medio clavis confixae videbantur, clavorum capitibus in interiore parte manuum et superiore pedum apparentibus, et eorum acuminibus existentibus ex adverso. Erant enim signa illa rotunda interius in manibus, exterius autem oblonga et caruncula quaedam apparebat quasi summitas clavorum retorta et repercussa quae carnem reliquam excedebat. Sic et in pedibus impressa erant signa clavorum et a carne reliqua elevata. Dextrum quoque latus quasi lancea transfixum cicatrice obducta erat quod saepe sanguinem emittebat, ita ut tunica eius cum femoralibus multoties respergeretur sanguine sacro.*

The rhetorical force of this passage resides in Thomas’s gruesome evocation of Francis’s wounds. The stigmata were not simply impressed upon his hands and feet and side; they assumed distinct shapes of their own, differing between the upper and lower surfaces of the hands and feet on which they occurred. The marks they left were round on the inside of the hands, but oblong on the outside. Small pieces of flesh

displayed the visual properties of the points of nails. The flesh was bent over and flattened and extended beyond the (presumably smooth) surface around it. On the hands, then, the wounds imitated the forms of nails. It was not the nails themselves that appeared, but their *marks*, or signs, the word *signa* appearing three times for emphasis.

*Signum* also refers to “seal,” “proof,” “image,” and/or “statue.” The stigmata encompass all these meanings for they are “impressed” (*impressa*) into Francis, just as a seal would be. They are proof of the vision that appeared to Francis, and of God’s love for the holy man. Furthermore, the stigmata represent things that are not literally there, the nails – hence their status as “images” or “signs” which stand in for what they represent. Because they are carved into Francis’s flesh, they may also be said to be sculpted. The stigmata, in other words, are presented as objects as multi-layered in form and meaning as *signa*.

The marks on Francis’s feet are similar to those on his hands, although they are not described in nearly as much detail. And yet, if the passage is read closely, it would seem that the nails did indeed make an appearance at this site, for how else could they be “raised above the surrounding flesh”? The subtle differences between the descriptions of the hands and feet were surely deliberate and signal a decided ambiguity regarding the nature of the wounds. On parts of Francis’s body (perhaps even at specific times), the stigmata veer between their status as “marks” and “nails,” straining from one state of being to the other. One might draw a parallel between the stigmata’s semiotic instability as presented by Thomas and that of the Eucharist, which evinced a similar ambivalence and was the subject of a host of deliberations on the nature of signs and their referents in the medieval era.<sup>9</sup>

As for Francis’s side, Thomas claims that it looked as if it were pierced with a lance. This is the only wound that is not just a curiously shaped perforation – a mark or a sign of things that are not there. Referred to not as *signa* but as *cicatrice* (meaning “wound” or “scar”), it is filled with blood, which frequently oozes out, staining the holy man’s garments. Interestingly, *cicatrice* is qualified by the word *obducta*, which means “screened” or “covered over.” The side wound, therefore, is not merely an aperture sculpted in Francis’s flesh like the points of nails carving out signs in his hands and feet. This scar functions as a screen for the fifth and most important mark on Francis’s body, one that was doubted by

Pope Gregory IX himself (according to Bonaventure’s biography of Francis).<sup>10</sup> In his *Life of Saint Francis (Vita Sancti Francisci)* composed shortly after the *Vita Prima*, Julian of Speyer adheres to Thomas’s description of the stigmata and also refers to the side wound as *cicatrice obductum*.<sup>11</sup>

The problem with Thomas’s description is that even as it purports to be a graphic – even frighteningly forensic – account, it is also cryptic on certain key issues. The relationship between the marks and the surfaces on which they appear is not clearly spelled out, not least because of the to-and-fro between *signa* and *clavi*. Hans Belting observes that Francis’s body was regarded “as a pictorial medium, as against panel painting or other pictorial media.”<sup>12</sup> But again, a close reading of the texts reveals that that was not the only designation of the *alter Christus*’s physical self. Francis’s body could also be regarded as “a kind of painting,” as the saint himself observed about human beings in the service of God (the passage is quoted in full later in the chapter).<sup>13</sup> The texts, therefore, direct us to a multiplicity of questions and no simple resolutions: Was Francis a pictorial medium, as Belting claims, an image-bearing object (the stigmata being the images sculpted, drawn, or impressed on him), or the image itself, or both simultaneously?

This conundrum had real repercussions in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries in the legal sphere, when jurists made a decisive but nonetheless problematic distinction between the materials on which writing and painting appeared and the writing and painting itself.<sup>14</sup> “It was then necessary to decide which dominated by absorbing the other, to the extent that casuistry assumed the support and what was added to it belonged to different persons,”<sup>15</sup> as Marta Madero observes. Where several ancient jurists argued that the application of paint increased the value of the wood panel on which it was smeared, they denied a similar importance to writing. However, Azo, one of the greatest law masters in Italy in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, argued that both writing and painting were of equal value and that in both cases the surfaces on which they occurred were subordinate to what they bore.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, there was some debate as to whether the addition of painting or writing to a support (a wood panel, *charta*, or *membrana*) resulted in the creation of a new *species* altogether, or whether painting and writing always remained distinct from their

supports or were united to the latter without necessarily becoming one with them.<sup>17</sup>

These legal concerns impinge directly upon the phenomenon of Francis's body and its relationship to the wounds it bore. Franciscan hagiographies are not always explicit about whether the stigmata had been impressed upon Francis by an external agency (although all of them include the vision of the seraph as the catalyst), or whether the wounds were formed of his own flesh.<sup>18</sup> Translated into legal terms, this implies that the status of Francis as the owner or the bearer of the stigmata (such that "owner" and "bearer" signify two distinct forms of possession) was at issue; moreover, the status of his body as a "support" for the stigmata, or even an entirely new *species* as a consequence of their application to his flesh, was at stake. These concerns were not spelled out baldly, but my suggestion is that they informed, indirectly and otherwise, the representational framework of Francis's stigmatized body.

The *Vita Prima* seems to posit Francis as one whose own flesh produced the wounds, claiming that "the nails could be seen in the middle of the flesh itself, in the hands and feet" (*manus et pedes eius in ipso medio clavis confixae videbantur*). However, in the liturgical version of Francis's life composed by Thomas of Celano in 1230, barely a year after the *Vita Prima*, there is a change of tone. The *Legend for Use in the Choir* (*Legenda ad usum chori*) is an abbreviated account, consisting of only nine chapters; as a result, the stigmatization and its consequences take up far less space. But their description differs vastly from the one in the *Vita Prima*.<sup>19</sup>

He saw above him a crucified seraph who clearly impressed on him the signs of the crucifixion so that Francis, too, appeared crucified. Francis's hands, feet, and side were marked with the stamp of the cross and there appeared clearly on him the marks of Christ.

*In visione dei supra se vidit seraphim crucifixum, qui crucifixionis suae signa sic in eo expresse evidententer impressit ut crucifixus videretur et ipse. Consignantur manus et pedes et latus crucis caractere; resultant in ipso sedulo stigmata Christi.*

The *Legend for Use in the Choir*, therefore, goes a step further than the *Vita Prima*, stating that the stigmata were not products of Francis's own flesh but were impressed upon him by the seraph. Francis here is a passive recipient. Moreover, the phrase "marks of Christ" (*stigmata Christi*)



specifically attributes possession of the stigmata to someone other than Francis. The latter would seem to be no more than a medium – the bearer of the wounds – in this text.

A quotation ascribed to Francis himself hints at the conscious distinction between the image and its medium.

In pictures of God and the blessed Virgin painted on wood, God and the blessed Virgin are honored and God and the blessed Virgin are held in mind, yet the wood and the painting ascribe nothing to themselves, because they are just wood and paint; so the servant of God is a kind of painting, that is a creature of God in which God is honored for the sake of his benefits. But he ought to ascribe nothing to himself, just like the wood or the painting, but should render honor and glory to God alone.<sup>20</sup>

Francis is concerned with distinguishing the holy subjects depicted in the image from the image, and the image from the support on which it is delineated. In emphasizing the differences and similarities between the image and its support, the painting and the wooden board, Francis nudges the reader toward the legal distinctions and likenesses between the two. And since the categories of writing and painting and their respective supports were perceived to be closely allied to others, such as to the soil and the trees it bears, or the color or sleeves attached to a garment, or gold threads or rows of pearls woven into a fabric, the issue extended well beyond the domain of images and written documents to embrace a wider spectrum.<sup>21</sup> Francis was so often compared to a painting, or a document, or a pavement studded with stones, or a vessel containing precious gems, that the terms in which his body was framed by contemporary writers offer the same hermeneutic challenges as those faced by medieval legal eagles.

### Revelation and Concealment

But apart from the points already mentioned, the content of Thomas of Celano’s text itself becomes problematic when the reader discovers that the author has described a phenomenon that was never actually seen by him. Because he assumes the role of the omniscient narrator, Thomas’s precision regarding the stigmata is as persuasive as it is visceral. But, in fact, Thomas follows his description with the statement that “He hid

those marks carefully from strangers, and concealed them cautiously from people close to him, so that even the brothers at his side and his most devoted followers for a long time did not know about them. . . . Sadly, only a few merited seeing the sacred wound in his side during the life of the crucified servant of the crucified Lord.”<sup>22</sup>

The oscillation between a seemingly immediate report of the stigmata and the avowal that their possessor jealously withheld them from view is revealing about the textual representation of the wounds. What Thomas discloses, or appears to disclose, he also undoes by his presentation of Francis as one who regarded the stigmata as a secret and preserved them as such. This is a maneuver evident in all the hagiographic and liturgical materials that soon followed the *Vita Prima*, several of which took the latter as a model. The representational tactics in these texts are provocative, veering between the verbal uncovering of the stigmata and, in a volte-face, their concealment. Each account sounds the theme of the stigmata as a personal secret revealed to Francis by a heavenly force. The author then elaborates upon this secret, even as he admits that he himself was never privy to it.<sup>23</sup>

Pertinent here is Frank Kermode’s classic discussion of the potential for secrets that narratives possess and disclose.<sup>24</sup> A narrative is the product of two intertwining processes: the presentation of a fable, and the subsequent interpretations that might alter it. Kermode asserts the first as tending toward the sort of clarity and propriety with which readers are familiar, and the second as tending toward secrecy, or the distortions that cover secrets. In a claim reminiscent of the didactic aims of hagiography, Kermode points out that authors deliberately “foreground” those directions in which they wish to steer readers. But to do this, authors must by necessity also “‘background’ other aspects of the narrative. Consequently, the less manifest portions of its text (its secrets) remain secret, resisting all but abnormally attentive scrutiny.”<sup>25</sup>

Kermode discusses a mode of reading that demands a measure of reflexivity on the part of a reader in gauging the sleights of hand unfolding backgrounds, even as suitable foregrounds are etched. The Franciscan texts in question do not require the “abnormally attentive scrutiny” recommended by Kermode, even if they command a degree of engagement. Rather, these texts reveal their “background” effects in straightforward conjunctions with their “foregrounds.” The writers are

disarmingly truthful about their distance from what they undertake to describe. And in their efforts at description they assume that “some secrets can be shared without ceasing to be secret,” as another literary critic, J. Hillis Miller, puts it.<sup>26</sup>

As one who transmits the first extended account of the stigmata, Thomas of Celano bears the heavy burden of bearing primary witness to them. His textual strategies, however, complicate the notion of the “witness” and strain the boundaries of a practice of the Roman Catholic Church, which was increasingly codified in the course of the thirteenth century: sanctity could be pronounced only on the evidence of a life of virtuous conduct and the performance of miracles by the holy, attested to by witnesses or beneficiaries.<sup>27</sup> The fact that sanctity was cast in a legal and empirical framework intersects with the other legal issues pertaining to the stigmatization mentioned previously. Of course, the medieval hagiographer was not expected to possess firsthand experiential knowledge of what he or she wrote about, as long as the contents of the narrative were well attested to by others.<sup>28</sup> Where Thomas of Celano surprises, therefore, is not so much in not having been a witness to every event in Francis’s life that he describes but in his frequent avowal of the fact that the stigmatization and the stigmata were secrets hidden from the eyes of the world. When contrasted with the *vita* of another thirteenth-century stigmatic, Elizabeth of Spalbeek, the insistence on secrecy in Francis’s case leaps out in all its multifaceted ambiguity. Elizabeth’s stigmata and her spiritual practices were observed and recorded by Philip, abbot of Clairvaux, in 1267 in a detailed report that evinces “an ethnographer’s concern for meticulous description.”<sup>29</sup> Meticulousness is evident in Thomas of Celano’s report as well, but in a mode that consistently undermines itself in order to highlight the stigmata as secrets.

This last observation is telling for an aspect of Francis’s personality that consistently inflects the written (and visual) materials dedicated to him, but which has not been given the attention it deserves: the saint’s tendency for secrets in general. He who was “truly France-ish”<sup>30</sup> was not as frank as his name would imply. Well before the stigmatization, Francis cultivated secrets, a theme that forms a running thread in Thomas’s account.

Early in his life, when a youthful Francis was keen to dedicate himself to God, “he concealed the pearl he had found from the eyes of mockers and selling all he had, he tried to buy it secretly.”<sup>31</sup> The mercantile

metaphor is an apt one, alluding to Francis's father's trade and his own rejected inheritance. The connotation of the concealed pearl is more complex; it recurs in the *Vita Prima* at critical moments and is also evident in the *Life* by Julian of Speyer, where the stigmata are described as "a most precious treasure" hidden from all eyes.<sup>32</sup> The theme continues in the early episode described by Thomas of Celano, when Francis tells a friend that he has found a "great and valuable treasure."<sup>33</sup> If the "treasure" (pearls and all) refers to Francis's newfound ardor for God, then it is not content to remain such an abstract quantity; it finds expression in Francis's gestures and words. He prays to "his Father in secret" and acts "in such a way that no one would know what was happening to him." He speaks "cautiously and in riddles . . . in figures of speech."<sup>34</sup>

This behavior contrasts with Francis's insistence on poverty, of complete renunciation of goods and self, and his knack for preaching openly and intimately, even to a crowd comprising thousands.<sup>35</sup> In a sensitive analysis of the Franciscan Order, Michel de Certeau contends that its vow of poverty "divested one of any asset or held-back secret. It was essentially epiphanic. The stories of 'brothers' or 'sisters' worked in the direction of composing a legible scene."<sup>36</sup> But Thomas of Celano, subtly and insistently, tells us that Francis did in fact hold back secrets (as did some of the "brothers" and "sisters" of his Order) and, furthermore, that he regarded those secrets as "assets" – as "treasures" and "pearls."

Thomas mentions that Francis would divide his time between spreading the word of God to the multitudes and retreating into solitude, bidding a few trusted companions to "shield him from the interruption and disturbance of people."<sup>37</sup> Whenever he wished to be alone, he would recite a particular verse, and his companions would dismiss the crowds. That verse, drawn from Romans, was "I have hidden your words in my heart to avoid any sin against you."<sup>38</sup> Thomas goes on to claim that Francis "had learned through experience that one cannot be a spiritual person unless one's secrets are deeper and more numerous than what can be seen on the face."<sup>39</sup> While this (intermittent) desire for solitude portrays the principles of eremitic austerity, some of which Francis remained faithful to, I argue that it also furnishes a useful framework within which to situate the stigmata, signs bestowed in suitably eremitic conditions, but whose very rarity necessitated their publicity by the Order.

Francis hid those most divine “secrets” which pierced the surface of his body from his associates and the wider public, for “he feared he would lose some of the grace given to him.”<sup>40</sup> This observation, combined with the saint’s appreciation of the value of secrets, provides a glimpse into his conception (as construed by Thomas of Celano) of the powers of sight. Francis betrays a decided ambivalence toward this faculty, regarding it as one capable of dispossession. In a further displacement of the primacy of sight, Thomas mentions Brother Rufino’s tactile experience of the fifth and most controversial wound. While rubbing Francis’s chest, Rufino’s hand slipped and touched the scar, causing Francis to cry out in pain and push his hand away. Whether Rufino realizes that it is the stigmata he has touched is not evident from the account.<sup>41</sup>

Thomas of Celano, for all his description of the stigmata, colludes in Francis’s desire to keep them concealed. This is evident in his account of Francis’s funeral where the saint’s body is uncovered to the eyes of the world:

Their mourning turned into song,  
 Their weeping into jubilation.  
 For they had never heard or read in Scripture  
 About what their eyes could see:  
 they could not have been persuaded to believe it  
 if it were not demonstrated by such clear evidence.  
 In fact,  
 there appeared in him  
 the form of the cross and passion  
 of the spotless lamb  
 who washed away the sins of the world.  
 It seemed  
 he had just been taken down from the cross,  
 his hands and feet pierced by nails  
 and his right side  
 wounded by a lance.<sup>42</sup>

*Versus est luctus in canticum, et ploratio in iubilationem. Numquam enim audierant, nec legerant in scripturis quod oculis monstrabatur quod et persuaderi vix potuisset eis si non tam evidenti testimonio probaretur. Resultabat revera in eo forma crucis et passionis Agni immaculati qui lavit crimina mundi dum quasi recenter e cruce depositus videretur manus et pedes clavis confixos habens et dextrum latus quasi lancea vulneratum.*

The evocation of Christ's crucifixion on Francis's body is swiftly "redone" by Thomas in the lines that follow: "They looked at his skin which was black before but now shining white in its beauty. . . . They saw his face like the face of an angel, as if he were not dead, but alive. . . . His muscles were not taut, . . . his limbs were not rigid."<sup>43</sup> Christ's broken body is *not* visible in Francis, whose form emanates an angelic radiance. But most importantly, Thomas's narrative transforms the very appearance of the stigmata.

It was even more wonderful for them to see in the middle of his hands and feet not just the holes of the nails, but the nails themselves formed by his own flesh, retaining the dark color of iron, and his right side red with blood. These signs of martyrdom did not provoke horror, but added great beauty and grace, like little black stones in a white pavement.<sup>44</sup>

*Cum que tam mira pulchritudine cunctis cernentibus resplenderet et caro eius candidior esset effecta cernere mirabile erat in medio manuum et pedum ipsius non clavorum quidem puncturas sed ipsos clavos ex eius carne compositos ferri retenta nigredine ac dextrum latus sanguine rubricatum. Non incutiebant horrorem mentibus intuentium signa martyrii sed decorem multum conferebant et gratiam sicut in pavimento albo nigri lapilli solent.*

This passage is significant, not least because it claims that the wounds on Francis's hands and feet were not merely "signs," as Thomas had described them in the episode of the stigmatization, but that they were the "nails themselves formed by his own flesh" (*non clavorum quidem puncturas sed ipsos clavos ex eius carne compositos*). The *signa* or *puncturas* (meaning "pricks" or marks") are replaced by the *clavi*; the "signs," "image," or "statue" by their referents. Why is this so? Surely it would have made more sense to present the "real thing" as part of Francis's experience and to bestow the "image" or the "signs" on the eyes of the world? But I would venture that that is precisely what Francis's body is made to overwrite. By placing the marks of the nails on him, the seraph – or the divine "hand" – crafted a representation. It is the *representation* that Francis so assiduously conceals. When his body is uncovered, it is bereft of life and that divine marking, or writing, or drawing. The representation is hidden by what it represents, rather like a human being substituting for the statue of one. The marks are literally covered over, screened, and hidden by the nails now visible to the grieving (and simultaneously rejoicing) crowd.<sup>45</sup>

No less significant is Thomas’s description of *how* the nails and the side wound were perceived by the world. They did not elicit horror, “but added great beauty and grace, like little black stones, or pebbles, in a white pavement” (*sed decorem multum conferebant et gratiam sicut in pavimento albo nigri lapilli solent*). Instead of communicating their brutal intrusion into Francis’s flesh, they now seem a natural part of his body. One might argue that the divine representation is replaced by something that is assimilated to an emphatically man-made artifact: mosaic, specifically, a quincunx, composed of five black stones embedded in a white background.<sup>46</sup> The divine image is substituted by one that would have been familiar to medieval eyes, rather than the near-heretical thing it was while Francis lived.

### Stigmata and Stones

A panel in the Uffizi, dated between 1240 and 1270, alludes ingeniously to the pretty pavement studded with stones, a loaded metaphor in the Franciscan discourse and one that compresses a wealth of associations (Plate XII). In the panel, Francis kneels with arms outstretched to the seraph pinned to a cross. Three rays abruptly materialize from the plain gold background against which the seraph hovers, and touch Francis’s halo. The saint’s hands and feet are punctured by tiny, but visible black holes, while the side wound is not depicted. The rocky landscape at La Verna is conjured by the long lines of the cliffs that drop steeply to Francis’s left. The chapel forms an architectural backdrop to the saint, its bricks lined up in regular rectangles behind the folds of his habit.

But the ground Francis kneels on is quite different from the rocks of La Verna. An expanse of triangles and rectangles wedged together, it resembles a pavement of white and gray stones interrupted by a smattering of black pebbles. Their geometric clarity is in sharp contrast to the broad, unbroken patch of brown-pink washing over the cliff, tinged with golden lights. The pavement is devoid of any sign of the seraphic glow. However, it is the support upon which Francis rests his body even as it undergoes its stupendous transformation. His right foot is nicely framed by three black stones; one at his heel, and one each at the tip of his little and big toe. Comprising two triangles and one rectangle, their counterpart is the perfect circle constituting the mark on Francis’s foot.

The mark on the left foot is in near-vertical alignment with the line framing the upper part of the chapel. This line is part of a configuration of an x bordered by two tiny circles above and below and flanked by another line. The x recurs just above Francis's right hand, spanning the space between his thumb and his palm bearing the impressed circle (or mark). In perfect alignment with the white cord fastening Francis's robe is a tiny cross, bathed in gold, positioned above the chapel's pediment, and a triangular black stone below.

These arrangements are not random. The configuration of crosses in the form of the x's dotting the chapel constitutes the ornamental counterpart of the symbolic structure hovering above the pediment. These are the miniature, symbolic versions of the crucifix. Furthermore, all these crosses constitute the man-made foils to the heavenly cross upon which the seraph is pinned. They are a calculated attempt to position Francis's body – that divine representation, or support for divine representation – within the framework of a man-made structure. The chapel of bricks and the pavement of black and white stones stand as contiguous representations, but of an entirely different order from the stigmata. Even as the former are the still, mute witnesses of the stigmatization, they do not partake of that event. The rays that pierce Francis's halo leave no residues on them, unlike the cliffs (a natural feature) that reflect the surrounding gold like streaks of extended lightning.

Outlined here is a hierarchy. Francis's body sustains the fullest effects of the seraphic vision; the landscape reflects some of its radiance; and the architectural structure (apart from the miniature cross on the pediment), none at all. But if the stigmata are marks of the divine on Francis's body, so too are the circles (or holes) on his painted body the marks of the painter. This is the paradox of the panel. The stigmata operate on two distinct levels on it, and potentially on every other panel depicting Francis as well. They are both representable and otherwise – products of a mortal hand, and referents of the ineffable touch of the divine.

The conceit of manufacture, so simply and effectively captured on the Uffizi panel, has a prehistory, as does the metaphor of the stones laid in a pavement. Twelfth-century texts exhorted students of sacred scripture to emulate master masons. Scripture being an edifice, the mason (or student) lays the foundation and, as Hugh of St. Victor puts it, “then, one by



one, he lays the diligently polished stones in a row.”<sup>47</sup> The value of these stones lies in the usefulness and delight they occasion in the reader of scripture. “And if [the mason] by chance finds some [stones] that do not fit with the fixed course he has laid, he takes his file, smoothes off the protruding parts, files down the rough spots . . . and so at last joins them to the rest of the stones set into the row.”<sup>48</sup>

Thomas of Celano’s likening of Francis’s wounds to stones seamlessly set into a pavement draws, consciously or otherwise, a parallel to the notion of scripture as an edifice. In this case, it is Francis’s dead body and Thomas’s hagiography, in which that body appears, that are assimilated to a foundation. The nails evident on Francis’s flesh are the stones, or the critical ornamental nodes, of Thomas’s text. Roughhewn when hidden and described as such in the *Vita Prima*, they revoke the untidy visual impact of broken flesh when they are exposed on Francis’s body and in the narrative. Thomas may be said to “file” his graphic description of the wounds to their right proportions, when the nails become objects of delight and instruction rather than the instruments of pain.

Significantly, Julian of Speyer closes his chapter on Francis’s funeral by stating that the saint’s “most sacred body was carried into the city and buried in the place where he had first learned his letters . . . and where he had preached for the first time.”<sup>49</sup> Here, too, Francis’s body sustains the connotations of a sacred text, laid to rest at the spot that first saw its development in literacy, and then the transmission of its knowledge to the wider world. Francis’s corpse embodies the perfect narrative, according to Julian, for it weaves a beginning, a middle, and an end, which “suitably come together through this body into one single height of glory.”<sup>50</sup>

Mention of the “stones” recurs again in the *Vita Prima* a few chapters later in the account of Francis’s canonization. Pope Gregory IX arrives in Assisi to do the honors. Thomas devotes quite a few lines to describing the “supreme pontiff” of the Church of Christ. He is

marked with the sign of holiness. He stands adorned with the pontifical regalia and clothed in holy vestments with settings of gold, the work of a jeweler. He stands there, the Lord’s anointed, gilded in magnificence and glory and covered with precious stones cut and sparkling, catching the eyes of all.<sup>51</sup>

*signo sanctitatis expressa. Adstat pontificalibus infulis decoratus et vestibus sanctitatis indutus in ligatura auri et opere lapidarii sculptilis. Adstat christus Domini in magnificentia gloriae deauratus et vernantibus figuratis que gemmis coopertus omnes sollicitat ad videndum.*

The similarities to the description of the *alter Christus* are unmistakable. The “sign of holiness” marked out on Gregory’s headdress, anointed by the Lord, draws immediate parallels to the signs on Francis’s own body and his divine anointment. But the differences between the signatures bestowed on the two men are just as emphatic. At each step Thomas draws attention to Gregory’s accoutrements and not to his person. The crown, the vestments, the jewels – all symbols of holy investiture – partake of divine glory. Gregory himself is the representative and *not the representation* of God. As such, he is “gilded” with “settings of gold” which are the handiwork of jewelers. Contrast this with a verse in the *Sanctitatis Nova Signa* (Sanctity’s New Signs), a hymn commonly attributed to Thomas of Celano of which a verse claims:

No instruments of skill were used  
To carve out those limbs’ apertures;  
Nor were the dug out holes nature’s  
Nor from mallet’s cruel weight.<sup>52</sup>

Where Francis’s marks (or “stones”) could never claim their origins in human manufacture or natural marvel, so exclusively were they the work of God, Gregory’s “precious stones” are cut by the hands of jewelers. They sparkle for all eyes to see. Not functioning as secrets that are transformed upon exhibition, they proudly proclaim their manufactured status.

The parallels do not end there. Thomas describes the cardinals and bishops gathered, who are also “clothed with jewels glittering on garments gleaming white as snow, offering an image of the beauty of heaven”<sup>53</sup> (*splendidioribus ornati monilibus et niveis fulgoribus candidati supercaelestium pulchritudinum imaginem praeferunt et glorificatorum gaudium repraesentant*).

Once again, flesh is contrasted with clothing; the integrity of the body with the artificial layers it may acquire. The snow-white garments of the cardinals and bishops play off against Francis’s (now) radiant white flesh. Because the garments are said to display an *image* of heaven (*pulchritudinem imaginem praeferunt*), they serve in turn to complicate the

status of Francis’s body. The verb *praeferunt* refers to “carry in front,” “display,” and “offer.” In the network of binaries weaving Francis and the church representatives together, *praeferunt* collapses the image with the image-bearing object. It repeats the question implicitly posed in the earlier portion of Thomas’s text: Does Francis “carry his image in front,” or is he the “display” (the image) itself?

Julian of Speyer’s account of Francis’s funeral does not use the metaphor of the “little black stones.” Instead, Francis’s hands are said to be “adorned with the most precious gems”<sup>54</sup> (*pretiosissimis gemmis ornatas*). But Julian, unlike Thomas, blurs what the crowds observe in the first place:

It was then glorious to see in such white flesh the likeness of the print of nails – indeed, nails as black as iron, formed from his very flesh.

*Gloriosum tunc erat in carne tam candida videre similitudinem fixurae clavorum immo, nigros ut ferrum clavos ex ipsa carne formatos.*

Julian begins by using the same expression, “the prints of nails” (*fixurae clavorum*) as he does in his description of the stigmatization.<sup>55</sup> Then swiftly qualifying the phrase with *immo*, signifying a contradiction or addition (“no indeed,” or “more correctly”), Julian refers to “the nails.” But it is difficult to decipher whether the latter refer to their referents or to the *prints* of the nails, as asserted before. Whether this fuzzy phrasing attests to Julian’s own confusion or to a deliberate obfuscation on his part is impossible to say. What it does disclose is a hint – and not a very subtle one – about the problems engendered in attributing a stable status to the stigmata by those who took it upon themselves to write about it. Are they signifiers or the signified? Or do they constantly veer between the two, transforming themselves according to the circumstances of their display? Is Francis a medium or a representation? How does one describe and explain a phenomenon without witnesses? A close reading of the early accounts demonstrates the discomfort their writers encountered in contending with these questions.

### The *Vita Secunda*

Thomas of Celano was commissioned to write a second life of Francis, which was completed between 1245 and 1247, and a *Treatise on the*

*Miracles (Tractatus de miraculis Sancti Francisci)* in 1250, which he finished by 1252. For scholars, the importance of the *Vita Secunda* lies in its contribution to source criticism, as Rosalind B. Brooke points out, and how it integrates passages and episodes from a variety of other early written sources, particularly the *Legend of the Three Companions (Legenda trium sociorum)*.<sup>56</sup> Although the *Vita Secunda* has been judged less efficient in its rhetorical appeal than the sources from which it draws, it introduces numerous themes missing in the *Vita Prima*. All of these furnish a fascinating insight into the associations deemed important for the development of Francis's cult in the 1240s. The stigmatization occupies far less space in the *Vita Secunda*, as it does in the *Legend of the Three Companions*. But while the latter gives a brief description of the wounds, the *Vita Secunda* pointedly omits the circumstances in which they came about and their description. They are, however, mentioned in the context of witness – a marked change from the *Vita Prima*.

One entire chapter is devoted to this subject. Thomas begins by observing that “the location of the wounds on the hands and feet in such exposed parts of the body allowed some to see them,”<sup>57</sup> in stark contradiction of Francis's assiduity in hiding them in the *Vita Prima*, even on those parts of his limbs that were visible. Thomas continues with the observation that the side wound was the great secret, made visible only once, and to only one person, during Francis's lifetime. It is not the wounds in their entirety, but the fifth wound that assumes importance in the *Vita Secunda*. (This is also the case in the *Legend of the Three Companions*, in which the wound on the side is referred to as the “very real and very visible wound.”)<sup>58</sup>

In the *Vita Secunda*, Francis is remarkably candid and permits his body a degree of accessibility. He allows his tunic to be shaken out, although he covers the side wound with his right arm or his left hand during the process.<sup>59</sup> A companion rubs his body and inadvertently touches the wound.<sup>60</sup> Interestingly, it is not the same companion but a different one – more curious and cunning – who asks to shake out Francis's habit and, while doing so, spies “with watchful eyes” the wound marked on his side.<sup>61</sup> Where the *Vita Prima* discreetly enabled Brother Rufino's tactile contact with the side wound while never mentioning whether Rufino understood the import of what he had touched, the *Vita Secunda* doubles the number of witnesses and the faculties

involved: one companion touches the wound, while another sees it, and recognizes what he sees.

But even if the stigmata are treated with laconicity, the *Vita Secunda* is loquacious about aspects of Francis’s behavior and possessions, which forge connections with key themes regarding the stigmatization. In an early chapter, Thomas describes in detail the episode of the crucifix at S. Damiano. This is reported as “something unheard of in previous ages,” just like the stigmatization.<sup>62</sup> The lips of the painting moved, and the image of the crucified Christ spoke to the youth, bidding him to rebuild “my house.” Thomas claims that thenceforth

compassion for the Crucified was impressed into his holy soul. And we honestly believe the wounds of the sacred Passion were impressed deep into his heart, though not yet on his flesh. . . . Who could ever doubt that Francis . . . already appeared crucified? . . . From that very hour his soul melted as the Beloved spoke to him. A little while afterward his heart’s love showed in the wounds of his body.<sup>63</sup>

*Infigitur ex tunc sanctae animae Crucifixi compassio et ut pie putari potest cordi eius licet nondum carni venerandae stigmata passionis altius imprimuntur. . . . Quis Franciscum iam redeuntem ad patriam apparuisse dubitat crucifixum? . . . Ab ea igitur hora liquefacta est anima eius ut dilectus ei locutus est. Patuit paulo post amor cordis per vulnera corporis.*

The encounter with the talking crucifix is identified as the originary moment of the stigmatization. The event is omitted in the *Vita Prima*, which describes the phenomenon itself. The *Vita Secunda*, in contrast, provides an analogy to the stigmatization, the terms of which are firmly grounded in the interaction of viewer and image. This text explicitly structures the reception of the stigmata as a process during which they moved from the interior (impressed upon Francis after his conversation with the crucifix) to the exterior, from soul to flesh. The “impression” evokes metaphors of sealing and stamping on a malleable surface, the results of which are later displayed on Francis’s body.

A seemingly minor but significant detail in this chapter is its epilogue. It mentions Francis “working tirelessly to rebuild that church” in which the crucifix was located, although the crucifix had referred to the church as an entity when it spoke and not to the particular building in which it was housed. Thomas of Celano defends Francis’s actions by stating that the

message was not clear to him for “he did not immediately reach that level, but moved gradually from flesh to spirit”<sup>64</sup> (*noluit repente fieri summus paulatim de carne transiturus ad spiritum*).

Two contradictory movements are juxtaposed in this episode: the stigmata, which move from the soul to the flesh, and Francis’s interpretative capacities, which move from the flesh to the spirit. The episode describes them as occurring simultaneously. The stigmata gradually expose themselves, and Francis’s understanding of the divine (in the form of vision and voice) gains in nuance. Exterior display takes place along with the eclipse of the literal. This is as deliberate as Thomas’s transformation of the stigmata into ornaments when they are uncovered in the *Vita Prima*; in their capacity as “stones,” they continue to conceal Francis’s personal experience of the wounds. Similarly, the stigmata described in the *Vita Secunda* make themselves visible at the same time that Francis learns to read *beyond the letter*, an implicit warning that the reader or listener of the text would do well not to take the description – or the sight – of the wounds literally.

This last point is helped along by the fact that the *Vita Secunda* does not impart such a description at all, even if it claims that the stigmata were seen and touched by some people. Their existence is taken for granted. But the silence regarding the events at La Verna and their consequences is a resounding hint that the stigmatization and the stigmata were phenomena without witness, and that their descriptions are to be read, or heard, while keeping the fact in mind.

### The Treatise on the Miracles

The *Treatise on the Miracles* composed by Thomas of Celano just two years later performs a further distortion on the stigmatization. The first chapter begins by claiming that the first miracle to be described will be the one that occurred at La Verna.<sup>65</sup> Accordingly, the second chapter begins with the following statement: “The new man, Francis . . . appeared marked (*insignitus*), adorned (*decoratus*) with the sacred stigmata, and conformed in this body of death to the body of the Crucified.”<sup>66</sup> Following upon this proclamation, the chapter gives an account of the various mysteries of the cross that “shone around” Francis from his youth. The episode at S. Damiano is also mentioned as the initiation of Francis’s body to the stigmatization. After the crucifix spoke,

the memory of the Lord’s passion was stamped on his heart with a deep brand-mark, and as conversion reached his deepest self, his soul began to melt, as his beloved spoke.<sup>67</sup>

*profundo caractere impressa fuit cordi eius memoria dominicae passionis et alta in sese conversione reducta liquefieri coepit anima eius ut dilectus locutus est.*

The terms used are more specific than those in the *Vita Secunda*. *Caractere* refers to a “brand” or “impressed letter” and *liquefieri* to the melting or dissolution that follows the branding. Immediately afterward, the text claims that Francis “enclosed himself in the cross itself when he put on the habit of a penitent, bearing the image of the cross” (*Nonne etiam in ipsa se cruce recludens habitum poenitentiae sumpsit crucis imaginem praeferentem*), and “just as, internally, his mind had put on the crucified Lord, so externally, his whole body put on the cross of Christ”<sup>68</sup> (*ut mens eius intro Dominum crucifixum induerat sic totum corpus eius crucem Christi foris indueret*).

The movements here are in accord; interior and exterior receive the cross simultaneously. However, the verbs used differ. Francis’s crude garb “reveals (*recludens*) the cross in him,” *recludere* meaning “to open” or “to disclose.” His mind and body, on the other hand, “put on (*induerat*) the cross.” *Induere* literally means “to clothe,” “cover,” or “dress oneself in.” The rhythm of revelation and concealment evident in the *Vita Prima* continues in the *Treatise on the Miracles* with the dual employment of *recludere* and *induere*. Francis’s habit discloses the cross as if it were an image he bore (*crucis imaginem praeferentem*). His mind and body, however, cover themselves with the cross. This is followed immediately by the word *signo*, when Thomas states that Francis’s army would battle for God in the “sign by which God had vanquished”<sup>69</sup> (*et in quo signo Deus potestates aereas debellarat*). The cross covering the saint’s mind and body, then, is associated with a “sign.” His man-made habit is the visible cross, whereas the one stamped on his exterior and interior by the divine is framed as the signifier. Once again, the account artfully desists from describing the signified – the “real” wounds.

The *Treatise* goes on to mention various visions by Franciscan friars in which Francis appears with, or attached to, a configuration of the cross. While these indicate the *alter Christus*’s unique association with the cross, they are also important in their status as *signs*. Brother Sylvester saw a

golden cross issuing forth from Francis's mouth; Brother Pacifico saw with his "bodily eyes" a sign of the Tau on Francis's forehead.<sup>70</sup> These two visions are concentrated on features of Francis's face, not his body; thus, they prepare the audience for Francis's unique encounter with the cross even as they omit reference to the saint's entire being.

Brother Monaldo, on the other hand, saw "in bodily fashion, blessed Francis crucified, while blessed Anthony was preaching about the inscription on the cross."<sup>71</sup> This episode (described in two brief lines) draws the strongest parallel between Francis and Christ, whereby the vocal reminiscence of the latter's ordeal evokes a vision of the Franciscan Order's founder on the cross. But this cross, too, is presented as a sign. What Brother Monaldo sees (albeit in "bodily fashion") is a vision, since Francis was not present at the chapter meeting in Arles where Anthony was preaching. Also, Monaldo (or, rather, Thomas of Celano) does not describe the particulars of the vision, whether the image of Francis on the cross included the stigmata or otherwise. Thus, the wounds are relegated to silence yet again.

The episodes of the stigmatization and Francis's funeral, however, repudiate that silence with a vengeance. The stigmatization and the stigmata are described. The passages are repeated almost verbatim from those in the *Vita Prima*, including the discrepancy between the "signs of the nails" after Francis's encounter with the seraph and the "nails themselves" at the funeral. However, these do not resemble "little black stones" in this account; they resolutely remain nails. This is highlighted (rather ghoulishly) by the statement, "From whatever point they were pressed, simultaneously, as if a single tendon, they pulsed at the opposite end"<sup>72</sup> (*qui dum a parte qualibet premerentur protinus quasi nervi continui ad partem oppositam resultabant*). The nails are emphatically likened to Francis's flesh from which they are said to be "marvelously fashioned" (*ex eius carne virtute divina mirifice fabrefactos*). Furthermore, they are subjected to a playful tactile examination. Pressed from various points, they reveal themselves to be living, pulsating entities.

We who say these things  
 have seen these things;  
 we have touched with our hands  
 what we are writing by hand.<sup>73</sup>

*Vidimus ista qui ista dicimus manibus contrectavimus quod manibus exaramus.*



Thomas asserts his status as an eyewitness to the stigmata. He claims not only to have seen the wounds but also to have touched them. The contradictions of the *Vita Prima* are revoked. The transparency of Francis’s body (to the seraph and, later, to the crowds at the funeral) is replicated by Thomas’s hand, which transmits the memory of its touch to writing – the experience of the wound to parchment. In a later chapter, Thomas mentions Lady Jacoba dei Settesoli, a dear friend of Francis, who rushed to his deathbed and held him in her arms. When she pulled back the veil, “She gazed on that precious vessel that hid a precious treasure adorned with five pearls. She beheld those engravings that the hand of the Almighty alone had produced for the whole world to admire”<sup>74</sup> (*Contemplatur pretiosum illud vas in quo et thesaurus latuerat pretiosus quinque margaritis ornatum. Cernit illas quas sola Omnipotentis manus toto orbe mirandas fecerat caelaturas atque insuetis plena laetitii in amico mortuo reviviscit*). Lady Jacoba apparently advised the friars to display the stigmata to the mourning crowds. Her son, a certain Giovanni Frigia Pennate, also swore that he had seen and touched the wounds. (Pennate, Thomas claims, grew up to be a Roman proconsul and count of the Sacred Palace, thus asserting his status as a witness par excellence.)<sup>75</sup>

Returning to the second chapter of the *Treatise*, many brothers, apart from Thomas, are also said to have seen the stigmata while Francis was alive, and at his death more than fifty friars, along with “countless” laypeople, venerated them.<sup>76</sup> The specific number (fifty), along with the names of witnesses such as Lady Jacoba and Pennate, add an empirical touch to the account, bolstering its claims. This is the only portion of the second chapter where the stigmata are invoked as themselves and not couched as signs, visions, or representations.

The following sections of the chapter, however, perform a seamless transition to the stigmata as signifiers – visions or images – the power of which are attested to by clerics and laypeople alike. A man from Potenza saw the stigmata on an image of Francis and was assailed by doubts as to their legitimacy. As punishment, a severe wound was inflicted on his left hand. “There was no mark on the glove, so the pain of the hidden wound corresponded to the hidden wound of his heart.”<sup>77</sup>

The chastisement is a neat reversal of Francis’s own stigmatization. Just as the *alter Christus*’s wounds corresponded to those he had already been marked with from his youth (beginning with the episode at S.

Damiano), so too the cleric received a wound that reflected his inner state of doubt. Moreover, the same dynamic interaction between a viewer and image is evident here as in the case of Francis and the crucifix. Francis received the imprint of the Passion as he gazed upon and heard the image of Christ crucified, while the cleric received a much modified and painful wound after gazing upon Francis's image. The episode pivots mimetic practice around the critical element of faith. The cleric looked upon the image with doubt – hence his wound.

The rest of the chapter describes episodes in which women and men (including a Franciscan friar) witness transformations in panel paintings of the stigmata, or see the stigmata in visions. The structure of the chapter is suggestive. It opens with accounts of visions and images of the cross and closes with reports of images and visions of the stigmata, thus maintaining an agreeable symmetry. The node tying the opening and closing sections is the account of the stigmatization and the description of the stigmata, where they are firmly posited as the signified – the wounds revealed for all to see and touch and experience *in the flesh*, and not as visions or representations.

In this respect, the *Treatise on the Miracles* differs from the *Vita Prima* and the *Vita Secunda*. The *Vita Prima* is filled with wonderfully intriguing paradoxes and confounds the status of the stigmata as “the marks of nails” and “the nails themselves.” The *Vita Secunda* never ventures to describe the appearance of the stigmata one way or another, even though it is careful to mention witnesses to the wounds. The second chapter of the *Treatise*, however, engages in a novel strategy, even as it replicates passages from the *Vita Prima*. It daringly brings together the experience of the stigmata as both signifiers *and* the signified. It does so by positioning the “real things” in the middle of the chapter, literally like nails holding aloft the two wings of a diptych.

### Bonaventure's Seal

In 1260 at the chapter at Narbonne, the Friars Minor mandated Bonaventure of Bagnoregio – the general minister of the Franciscan Order – to compose a biography of Francis based on the writings that were already in existence. The *Legenda Maior* (*Major Legend*) became the definitive biography of the *alter Christus* and was insistently structured

around the motif of the cross. It was completed in 1263 and approved at the chapter in Paris in 1266. A decree was passed soon afterward, ordering the destruction of all previous biographies of Francis. In this light, it is important to note the ways in which Bonaventure clarified (and obscured) facets of the stigmatization from the earlier sources in this most official of all the Franciscan hagiographies of the duecento. However, in the years before he wrote the *Legenda Maior*, Bonaventure took up some of its themes in sermons.

In a morning sermon preached in Paris on October 4, 1255, Bonaventure devotes a good deal of his speech to the validity of the stigmata. He claims, “Many trustworthy lay people actually saw the stigmata of Saint Francis and more than a hundred clerics confirmed it by their own testimony. And if every word is confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses, how much more by the evidence of a hundred?”<sup>78</sup> We are now squarely in the realm of the eyewitness; the stigmata are no longer marks concealed but marks displayed to, and seen by, the multitudes.

Bonaventure goes on to describe them. They were

imprinted in a way outside usual experience, contrary to nature’s laws and above human powers. . . . They were [also] contrary to nature’s laws, for there was a wound in his side from which his holy blood flowed, yet without applying bandages to it, the saint of God went on living . . . and they were above human powers, for his hands had no open wounds nor were they injured, which would have been the case had iron or wooden instruments been used. On the contrary, the nails came up out of the flesh, the heads on one side and the points bent over on the other, quite above the surface of the skin and distinct from the rest of the flesh of his hands and feet. It was so remarkable that no believer could possibly doubt that these signs were imprinted other than by an unparalleled miracle.<sup>79</sup>

Although this description seems but a variation of the one in the *Vita Prima*, it contains significant differences. Bonaventure claims that the stigmata were not “open wounds” or injuries but that the nails (not their marks, but the nails themselves) arose from and hovered high (or “quite”) above the surface of the flesh. Furthermore, the nails were distinct from the surrounding expanse on Francis’s hands and feet. The sermon does not present the picture of flesh broken into little pieces

as does the *Vita Prima*; the flesh in question is a smooth surface (without open wounds), undisturbed by the nails that tower above it.

Reinforcing this is Bonaventure's repeated assertion in the sermon that the stigmata constitute the Lord's seal. Medieval seals, as shown by Brigitte Miriam Bedos-Rezak, were more than objects signaling authority; "they exposed contemporary tensions in such realms as metaphysics, law, and semiotics."<sup>80</sup> The seal left an imprint, which denoted the trace of a contact between the seal matrix and the wax, or metal, on which it was impressed. Equally important, the imprint denoted contact between the seal and its user. The seal impression acquired some of the powers of the relic as it was associated with the physical being of the seal's user, who would often leave behind bits of his hair, teeth marks, or fingerprints in the wax along with the imprint.<sup>81</sup> The point of comparing the stigmatization with the act of sealing is to grant Francis's body the status of a relic, a repository of sacred touch.

But, as Bedos-Rezak points out, seal impressions could be reproduced. "The sameness of the seal impressions, to be sure, did not fully displace the necessary existence of an original, but the adequacy of such impressions was not in practice tested against an original. . . . Since, as a result of the mechanical reproductive technique, all impressions of a given matrix were assumed to be identical copies, they all ended up functioning as originals generating their own accuracy, truth, and validity."<sup>82</sup>

The seal set upon Francis overturns the mechanistic dimension, constituting as it does a unique act; no other person – officially, at any rate – had ever received the gift of that particular imprint. The stigmata – like medieval seals – were an extension of their (divine) user. Bonaventure draws an analogy to the pope's action of ratifying documents: "As it is the Pope's practice to endorse documents with his seal so Christ, having recognized the teaching of Saint Francis as his own, affixed the seal of the stigmata to his body."<sup>83</sup> Francis is likened to a document belonging to Christ or, rather, as a document that Christ recognizes as his own. By invoking the metaphor of the sealed document, Bonaventure posits Francis's body as one invested with self-evidentiary potential, much like a legal artifact. A telling thematic comparison might be made here with the fourteenth-century English lyrics known as the *Charters of Christ*, which locate Christ's body within manuscript culture by alluding to his tortured flesh as that of the sinless sheep killed, then flayed and stretched

for the production of medieval books. Emily Steiner remarks that, in the lyrics, Christ’s body is transformed from being the object of an affective gaze to being the descriptive detail. In the process, the lyrics convert an affective memory to legal memory through the practices of witnessing, seeing, and hearing the material written document that is the charter.<sup>84</sup> Although Francis’s body also brings together the affective and the legal tenors as do the *Charters of Christ*, there is one essential difference between the two: Francis’s body is simultaneously presented as an enigma that *cannot* be completely witnessed, seen, or heard. Moreover, the metaphor of sealing further emphasizes the enigma. Christ’s possession of Francis – and of the document or charter – is signaled by the fact that he sealed the saint’s body.

But despite Bonaventure’s reference to the documents ratified by the pope, it still is not entirely self-evident that Francis’s body *is* like such a document. When the pope or any other (temporal) authority placed his seal on parchment or wax, the impression of the seal remained on the malleable surface. The surface carried the form, or likeness, of the impressing matrix but was not itself the matrix. Similarly, the material of the matrix is distinct from the image sculpted or carved into it, which is then transferred to the parchment or wax. Following from this, it is not clear whether Bonaventure likens Francis’s body to the wax that Christ’s seal was set into, or the parchment, or the material of the matrix. This is underscored by the fact that in Italian the same word was used for a seal impression and for the image on a seal impression – *impressio*.<sup>85</sup>

In her essay on Franciscan seals, Ruth Wolff makes a distinction between those images of Francis which depict him with his chest thrust out to the seraph during the stigmatization and others that show him shrinking back.<sup>86</sup> The latter posture, Wolff argues, evokes the act of imprinting that the seraph performs. Francis retreats, or melts like hot wax, as the “seal” or “brand” is set upon him, a gesture implied by the saint’s pose. Bonaventure’s account complicates the nature of the impression with which Francis was sealed; by extension, he also complicates the nature of the surface, or Francis’s flesh, which received the imprint.

Wolff further argues that after Francis was impressed with the stigmata, he himself began to function as a seal.<sup>87</sup> That is, he set his seal of authority on the Franciscan Order and blessed various brothers in the sign of the cross. Here too, then, we notice a blurring of the signifier and

the signified, the surface and the marks imprinted on it. Francis receives a seal impression and then becomes the seal itself. In so doing, Francis's body operates as an *acheiropoietos*, an image not made by human hands, which has the power to replicate itself miraculously. Accounts of the behavior of Byzantine *acheiropoietas* often sharpen the confusion between the image and the image-bearing object. In one legend, for instance, Christ's face was imprinted from a cloth onto the surface of a tile, which object then became an image in its own right.<sup>88</sup> So too would seem to be the case with Francis, with an important difference; the *alter Christus* did not go on to impress the same seal that he had received on others. In making the sign of the cross, he was invoking or creating a different matrix altogether from the one that was stamped into his flesh. The stigmatization, therefore, incorporates the unique and reproductive aspects of the sealing process, but transforms some of its operative principles.

Bonaventure ends the sermon with an anecdote about Saint Ignatius of Antioch, whose heart "was found to have written on it the name of Jesus Christ in gold letters."<sup>89</sup> This miraculous discovery was effected after Ignatius's head was cut off for asserting that, while Christ could be taken from his lips, he could never be removed from his heart. Bonaventure claims, "Because Saint Francis set Christ crucified as a seal upon his arm, the precious gems of the stigmata of Jesus Christ appeared visibly on his body."<sup>90</sup> Apart from the reference to the seal, Bonaventure underscores the theme of visibility. Ignatius's "seal" was evident only after his heart "was torn from his body," whereas Francis's seal was set upon his person such that the world could potentially see it.

### The *Legenda Maior* and the *Legenda Minor*

It is in the *Legenda Maior* that Bonaventure elaborates on the stigmata as visible signs – veritable proofs of Francis's unique status – which also incorporated an element of secrecy. But before he introduces the motif of the secret, he describes the various stages whereby Francis received the vision of the seraph. This account (which is the subject of chapter 13) is striking for the logical clarity with which Bonaventure enumerates the processes of vision and comprehension leading to the stigmatization.

According to the account, Francis initially saw a fiery, brilliant seraph with six wings descending from heaven. When this being had arrived at a spot close to Francis,

there appeared between the wings the likeness of a man crucified, with his hands and feet extended in the form of a cross and fastened to a cross. . . . He rejoiced at the gracious way Christ looked upon him under the appearance of the Seraph.<sup>91</sup>

*apparuit inter alas effigies hominis crucifixi in modum crucis manus et pedes extensos habentis et cruci affixos. . . . Laetabatur quidem in gratioso aspectu quo a Christo sub specie seraph cernebat se conspici.*

Arnold Davidson has rightly argued that in using the expression, *Christo sub specie seraph*, Bonaventure refers not only to the vision of Christ but also to his real presence under the form of the Seraph of which Francis was given a glimpse – an overtone of the Eucharistic theme that pervades Bonaventure’s writings, and his equation of the stigmata with the sacraments.<sup>92</sup>

This is not specified in the *Vita Prima*, which mentions “a man having six wings like a Seraph, . . . arms extended and feet joined, affixed to a cross.”<sup>93</sup> Thomas of Celano’s description of the seraph does not clarify the precise configuration of the man on the cross and the winged creature, which together constituted Francis’s vision; they would seem to be a hybrid. Bonaventure is meticulous in rectifying these defects. Not only does he state that the visions succeeded each other (first the winged seraph, then the crucified man), but he also delineates the spatial relationship between the two (the man is visible *between* the wings) so that the reader or listener can re-create the “creature” in his own mind.

Moreover, Bonaventure elucidates the successive stages in Francis’s own reaction to the seraphic man. First, “he marveled exceedingly at the sight of so unfathomable a vision.”<sup>94</sup> But then he understood that it was prior warning of the fact that “he was to be totally transformed into the likeness of Christ crucified.”<sup>95</sup> This certitude is different from Francis’s (relatively vague) intimation in the *Vita Prima* prior to the stigmatization that he would have to suffer various trials.<sup>96</sup> The *Legenda Maior* is unequivocal about Francis’s complete comprehension of the vision at La Verna. Interestingly, however, Bonaventure claims that the “martyrdom” Francis was to suffer was not that of the flesh (*se non per martyrium*

*carnis*); it was to occur “by the enkindling of his soul”<sup>97</sup> (*sed per incendium mentis*). For all that, the vision “imprinted in his flesh a likeness of signs”<sup>98</sup> (*in carne non minus mirabilem signorum impressit effigiem*) as it disappeared. The description of the stigmata that follows is drawn almost verbatim from the *Vita Prima*; however, the context in which that description is placed pares away much of the ambiguity of Thomas of Celano’s account.

In the same chapter, Bonaventure draws a revealing parallel between Moses and Francis.

The angelic man Francis  
 came down from the mountain,  
 bearing within him  
 the likeness of the Crucified,  
 depicted not on tablets of stone or on panels of wood  
 carved by hand  
 but engraved on parts of his flesh  
 by the finger of the living God.<sup>99</sup>

*descendit angelicus vir Franciscus de monte se cum ferens crucifixi effigiem non in tabulis lapideis vel ligneis manu figuratam artificis sed in carnis membris descriptam digito Dei vivi.*

Just as the Old Testament prophet went up Mount Sinai to receive the tablets of the law from God, so did Francis receive a divine vision atop the mountain at La Verna. (Note how Bonaventure designates Francis as the “bearer” of Christ’s image, or likeness.) The analogy with Moses includes certain other motifs important to the Franciscan discourse. Moses went up Sinai twice. The first time he was granted the tablets written by God himself, which the prophet smashed in anger upon coming down from the mountain. The second time he went up Sinai, God instructed Moses to hew the tablets out of stone and engrave the commandments thereon with his own hand as he (God) dictated them. The Moses episode, then, consists of a divine artifact destroyed and replaced with a man-made one. Francis, however, is the foil to the tablets in that his body was marked by God’s own finger.

In Francis’s case, Bonaventure claims that the saint received *both* the stigmata and the Rule of the Franciscan Order from a heavenly agent. When Francis insisted that there was nothing in the Rule that was not the word of God, he was referring to the divine voice he had heard during



a previous sojourn on a mountain where he had written the Rule “as the vision had dictated.”<sup>100</sup> Bonaventure not only introduces the factor of the voice in the composition of the Rule but also incorporates sound in the event of the stigmatization – an innovation over the previous texts. Moses was denied the sight of God, except the latter’s back, whereas Francis was privy to both a vision and a conversation. The effects of the former were evident on the saint’s body, while the consequences of the latter (not on La Verna, but in the earlier episode atop the mountain) were recorded in the Rule.

By asserting the fact of the voice, Bonaventure accomplishes two goals. First, he is able to describe the stigmata in detail and remove them from the purview of the secret; second, he still preserves the mystery of the events at La Verna by positing the *conversation* as the phenomenon without witness. Bonaventure claims that a brother (aptly named *Illuminato*) chided Francis for withholding the marvelous signs on his body from the world, since “at times divine sacraments are revealed to you not for yourself alone but also for others”<sup>101</sup> (*Frater, non solum propter te verum etiam propter alios scias tibi ostendi aliquando sacramenta divina*). Francis duly consented to reveal the stigmata, and several brothers spotted them during his lifetime. However, Francis informed Brother *Illuminato* that what he had *heard* on La Verna he would never reveal to a living soul. Thus, in the *Legenda Maior* the stigmatization is not an exclusively visual phenomenon; it is also vocal. Bonaventure’s report satisfies the faculty of sight but refrains from disclosing the aural dimension.

Some of the material on witnesses in the *Legenda Maior* derives from the *Vita Secunda*, but with a difference. Bonaventure narrates the episode of the brother who tricked Francis into revealing a glimpse of the side wound. But where the *Vita Secunda* contented itself with a knowing glimpse and an unknowing touch, the *Legenda Maior* claims that the brother “even quickly touched it with three of his fingers determining the size of the wound by both sight and touch”<sup>102</sup> (*tres veloci contactu digitos applicans tam visu quam tactu vulneris quantitatem agnovit*). Bonaventure adds weight to the touching hand by describing it as a measuring hand; as a result, the side wound acquires specific dimensions. Although inflicted by a divine force, it corresponds to the size of three mortal fingers.

In the *Legenda Minor* (*Minor Legend*), commissioned as a liturgical piece akin to Thomas of Celano's *Legend for Use in the Choir*, Bonaventure departs from all prior descriptions of the stigmata:

The marks of nails began to appear immediately in his hands and feet. The heads of these appeared on the inner side of the hands and the upper side of the feet and their points on the opposite sides. The heads of the nails in his hands and feet were round, and their points, which were hammered and bent back, emerged and stuck out from the flesh. The bent part of the nails on the bottom of his feet were so prominent and extended so far out that they did not allow the soles of his feet to touch the ground. In fact, the finger of a hand could be put easily into the curved loop of the points, as I heard from those who saw them with their own eyes.<sup>103</sup>

*Statim namque in manibus eius et pedibus apparere coeperunt signa clavorum ipsorum capitibus in interiore parte manuum et superiore pedum apparentibus et eorum acuminibus existentibus ex adverso. Erantque clavorum capita in manibus et pedibus rotunda et nigra ipsa vero acumina oblonga retorta et reperiens quae de ipsa carne surgentia carnem reliquam excedebant. Siquidem reperiens ipsa clavorum sub pedibus adeo prominens erat et extra protensa ut non solum plantas solo libere applicari non sineret verum etiam intra curvationem arcualem ipsorum acuminum facile immitti valeret digitus manus sicut et ab eis ipse qui oculis propriis conspexerunt.*

This is the most explicit description of the stigmata explored so far. It illuminates the relationship of the wounds to the flesh with the highest degree of precision. Referring to the nails themselves, Bonaventure claims that they stuck out from the surrounding flesh such that they prevented Francis's soles from touching the ground. This is the first account to convey an idea of how the stigmata affected Francis's entire body and not just those areas imprinted with the wounds. Bonaventure describes the specific shape of the wounds as "curved loops." A human finger could have easily slipped into them, according to eyewitnesses.

This last assertion is worth some thought. Once again it brings together the faculties of sight and touch. It is not claimed that someone, or some people, actually put their fingers into the wounds (although at the end of the chapter Bonaventure mentions several witnesses seeing and kissing them). The implication is that the wounds were so clearly

visible – and explicable because of the nails hammered through them – that their measure was easily taken by sight alone. Drawn on Francis’s body by the finger of God, they could still accommodate the fingers of mortals. In making these claims, Bonaventure collapses the divine and human dimensions of the stigmata. Of heavenly manufacture, they are displayed to the world of men. Thus, they permit the bodily senses to access them in varied ways: stealthily and openly, knowingly and unknowingly, with eyes and hands in tandem, or separately. By the second half of the duecento, the stigmata retain their enigma but are simultaneously rendered as visible and empirical phenomena, susceptible to the faculties and measures of the temporal world.

### The Body as a Cipher

This chapter has explored the rhetorical tactics deployed by Franciscan hagiographers and liturgists in some of the most influential texts about the saint in the thirteenth century. By purporting to describe the stigmata – often in horrific detail – these texts seem to adhere to the predominant notion of the vividness of Franciscan literature; its immediacy and narrative force, which enables the viewer to see images form themselves from the words. This perception must be tempered with regard to the accounts explored earlier. Despite their vividness, they harbor ambiguities, even outright obfuscations, when they come to describe the most critical points of Francis’s life and person.

Admittedly, almost all texts contain such “blank spots” and perhaps none more than a genre such as hagiography, which necessarily puts in words experiences and sensations impossible to distill in that medium. However, this axiom should not obscure its special importance when applied to the Franciscan context. For one, none of our writers desists from describing the stigmata and the stigmatization; they undertake vivid descriptions of both, even as they betray their distance from the event and the wounds that resulted therefrom. The consequences of this “double-dealing” transform Francis’s body into a cipher. It becomes a site of deep uncertainty, and not just among the saint’s detractors who doubted the existence or veracity of his stigmatized body. It is equally so among his followers who accepted the stigmata but struggled to express it in words until, in the 1260s, Bonaventure sought to remedy the

situation. But even his (relatively) clearer accounts do not banish the ambivalences embedded in the *alter Christus*'s body.

The pictorial counterparts to the rhetorical performance of the Franciscan texts are images from the end of the duecento, which begin to include ostensible witnesses along with the figure of Francis in the scene of the stigmatization. One such famous image is by Giotto di Bondone (or his workshop) in the Upper Church of S. Francesco at Assisi. In it, a gigantic seraph shoots out thin rays of gold toward a kneeling Francis. In the immediate foreground, huddled in the right corner, sits a friar. Immersed in a book, his gaze does not lift itself toward the event taking place on the rocks. The friar and Francis occupy two distinct planes, thus signaling the complete separation between them, even as they inhabit the same visual surface. The viewer of the image is made privy to the stigmatization, while the figure within it (unconsciously) averts his gaze, thus denying his status as witness. In the process, the status of the stigmatization as a testifiable event is cast into doubt.

The images examined in the following chapter date to the first half of the duecento, and none includes witnesses in the scene of the stigmatization. And yet, each evinces an equally subtle, carefully wrought dance between transparency and opacity; the signifier and the signified; visibility and its lack. They work together with the texts explored in this chapter, not merely in their iconographic details, but in their overall rhetorical composition. The images engage a poetics of revelation and concealment similar to that of Franciscan texts. It is to them that we now must turn.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### DEPICTING FRANCIS'S SECRET

#### The Case of the Vanishing Stigmata

In the *Treatise on the Miracles* (1250–2), Thomas of Celano recounts a curious episode regarding the pictorial depiction of St. Francis's stigmata, which Bonaventure reiterates (with a few changes) in the *Legenda Maior* of 1266.<sup>1</sup>

The episode concerns a Roman matron who commissioned a portrait of Francis. One day she noticed that the portrait lacked the stigmata and was much disturbed. Even as she pondered their omission, the marks appeared, seamlessly and suddenly, on the surface of the image. The startled matron wondered whether she had failed to notice them; perhaps they had been depicted all along. On asking an eyewitness who had seen the original image, she was assured that her initial perception was correct: the image did *not* have the stigmata painted on it. At this point, the matron began to wonder whether both she and the witness were mistaken; perhaps the stigmata had always been depicted on the image after all. Only when the marks vanished as inexplicably as they had first appeared, and with a resounding finality, did the matron realize she had witnessed a miracle.

At first glance, the narrative seems to present a straightforward case for the existence of Francis's stigmata and for their inclusion on images of him. The saint's reception of Christ's wounds on his own body was a "shockingly literal"<sup>2</sup> act of mimesis, and one that was accepted only with great difficulty, amid much controversy.<sup>3</sup> Even as late as 1361 a monk could register his disbelief by sneering, "This Francis has become a new

God.”<sup>4</sup> The miracle narratives of images in which Francis’s stigmata appear and disappear (no less than their descriptions in hagiography) only serve to highlight the unease of the medieval world with the saint’s wounds.<sup>5</sup>

This narrative, however, reveals more than the general discomfiture that often prompted artists (and viewers) to efface the stigmata on panels and frescoes of the saint.<sup>6</sup> The protagonist of the tale is an image lacking a definitive feature; the dominant theme is doubt. Beginning with the dawning cognition of something missing, then moving to a state of uncertainty as to whether it *is* missing or not, and concluding with the realization that the missing piece, briefly restored, is now gone, the narrative is a gnomic meditation on the role of human agency in visual representation. It implies that Francis is a profoundly complex figure and, consequently, one that poses problems to artists and viewers alike. The appearance and disappearance of the stigmata on the image reflect their essentially ineffable nature; features that cannot be depicted as an artist might, in contrast, depict the body of Francis *before* he received the wounds. By the same token, a viewer may accept Francis as the *alter Christus* but may be equivocal about seeing the stigmata depicted (or not, as the case may be).<sup>7</sup>

Images of Francis manifest a similar reticence; indeed, the stigmata (when depicted, which is not always the case) would seem to follow the same pattern of appearance and disappearance as that remarked by the Roman matron on her panel. The full-length portrait of Francis in Sacro Speco at Subiaco, believed to be the first image of the saint, omits the stigmata and the nimbus.<sup>8</sup> The inscription describes Francis as “Frater Franciscus,” placing him within a larger community of friars rather than asserting his extraordinary individuality. But even when the unique signs of Francis’s sanctity are displayed, the images betray a tentativeness, an iconographic uncertainty. This is the case with a panel located in the Museo Medievale e Moderno at Arezzo, which, according to Cathleen Hoeniger, was repainted extensively soon after its initial creation, with “significant changes to the face and hood. In the revised image, the eyes had been lowered and made smaller, the nose had been lengthened, the neckline altered.”<sup>9</sup> Changes to these features indicate a degree of imprecision in the depiction of this saint in terms of his facial characteristics. The stigmata on the hands and feet of the image, however, were left

intact. (As Hoeniger remarks, "Most of the image of the saint had been retouched with the exception of his proper left hand holding the book and probably his two feet as well.)<sup>10</sup> But the controversial side wound is nowhere in evidence on this panel.

And yet that fifth wound is cleverly hinted at in several images of Francis by means of the Gospel book he holds, which shifts from a stark planar configuration in some depictions to a cross-embossed artifact in others. The book and the cross stand in for the wound beneath the habit, which, according to commentators, dripped blood and caused physical anguish to its bearer. As this chapter will show, Francis is presented as a deliberately layered entity, often clutching a man-made, visible artifact against a divinely imprinted, concealed wound. Foregrounds and backgrounds play off against each other in order to communicate the motif of a surface disrupted by intrusions. The Gospel book, in particular, encompasses this dialectic of interiority and exteriority, the surface and its seal. Francis's body was conceptualized as a document, a text inscribed by the finger of God.<sup>11</sup> Francis himself was perceived to be a divinely legitimated charter of the Franciscan Order. The Gospel book he holds, therefore, is a sign and type of his own body. Both are stamped by the cross, a design that the book depicts openly, but which the body conceals.

The images that most stunningly deploy the rhetoric of the exterior and interior, concealment and revelation, are the *vita* panels, depicting a full-length portrait of Francis flanked by scenes from his life and posthumous miracles. As some of the earliest and most enduring images of the saint, they require more sustained discussion than they have been granted so far. Scholarship has positioned them within two dominant hermeneutic frameworks. First, the scenes depicted on the panels have been traced to various texts in the Franciscan repertoire; those that cannot be matched to a text have been interpreted as extrapolations, or confluences of two or more episodes in the saint's life.<sup>12</sup> Second, the images – particularly the first one of its kind by Bonaventura Berlinghieri in 1235 (mentioned in the Introduction) – are regarded as instances of the nascent clarity and spatial illusionism of the art of the duecento, which reached its apogee in the ingenious pictorial spaces delineated by Giotto and Duccio at the end of the century.<sup>13</sup>

This view stems partly from a tenacious conception of the art of the *frati minori* as one that steadily took the first steps toward naturalism in the Middle Ages. The claim was properly articulated by Henry Thode in 1885, who argued that along with the texts and sermons they produced, the friars also endorsed images designed to touch the laity at their deepest emotional chords.<sup>14</sup> In keeping with this aim, holy figures were depicted in lifelike spaces, reacting to situations much as any ordinary medieval gent or lady would. So influential is Thode's reading that art historians continue to adhere to most (if not all) of its tenets even today.<sup>15</sup> The art of the Franciscan Order is deemed to possess a narrative immediacy bordering on transparency; a vividness that speaks directly to the viewer. This notion resonates with the oft-repeated claims about the immediacy of the frescoes of the Upper Chapel of the Church of S. Francesco at Assisi, in which the viewer seems to encounter and participate in a reality analogous to his own.<sup>16</sup> The beguiling narrative transparency and clarity perceived as intrinsic to Franciscan texts and images<sup>17</sup> is often contrasted with the (supposed) Dominican desistance from the same.<sup>18</sup> The seeds of this perception are implicitly traced back to the *vita* images propounded by the Franciscan Order in its earliest years and continued sporadically through the duecento.

This chapter revises the fundamental assumptions informing early Franciscan imagery (and, by extension, its successors) by arguing that the *vita* panels categorically negate transparency and a limpid naturalism. By deflecting attention away from strictly iconographic correspondences between the panels and their textual sources, the chapter contends that the scenes are selected and arranged so as to enable access to Francis's stigmatized body at certain sites while obscuring it at others. Consequently, viewer participation is structured as an interrupted process, and one that proffers insights into the possibilities and limits of the concepts of witness, sensory knowledge, and vision, rather than enabling a wholly immersive experience. Just as the hagiographic and liturgical texts of the early duecento perform the unveiling of Francis's wounds while simultaneously maintaining their secret status, so too the *vita* panels offer degrees of proximity to their protagonist, calibrated to the kinds of visual and tactile access Francis himself permitted or denied the world at large.



In doing all this, the *vita* panels emerge as the bearers of a peculiarly Franciscan visuality, and one that goes beyond depicting the salient episodes in the *alter Christus's* life and afterlife. Rather, the panels enforce a mode of viewing informed by Francis's own shifting relationship to the experience of physical and mystical revelation. This argument differs from previous interpretations of the *vita* panels, which have read them almost entirely in the light of their supposed sociopolitical contexts: as setting forth a fierce or temperate version of Francis, or transmitting the changing ideals of the Franciscan Order, or taking up the cause of the Spirituales or Conventuales. My interpretation, instead, reads the very composition of the panels as constitutive of a mode of viewing consonant with that urged by Francis upon his followers, and one that did not always endorse complete access. In the process, the panels impart lessons on vision, witness, and imitation as much as, or even more than, their propagation of the Franciscan precepts of poverty, charity, and humility.

Exactly why the Franciscan Order should have alighted upon the *vita* format in order to articulate its version of visuality requires some thought. It has long been recognized that the Franciscans looked to and adapted various models from Byzantium. Amy Neff, for instance, has shown how even the "mother church" of the Order at Assisi "skillfully manipulated images taken from Byzantine iconography in order to enhance a worship-space."<sup>19</sup> Neff also argues (as have others before her) that Bonaventure of Bagnoregio drew his ideas about Franciscan prayer from the spiritual thought and theology of John of Damascus, thus highlighting the intellectual attraction Byzantine thinkers held for the Franciscans.<sup>20</sup> As far as the *vita* icon is concerned, it is regarded as one of the image types the friars adapted from Byzantine sources, and is perceived to be an effective mode of pictorial hagiography; one that, in bringing together the portrait and narrative of Francis's life, conveyed the essentials about the *alter Christus* to a public still unfamiliar with his brand of charisma, and which legitimized Francis by inscribing him in a lineage of venerable persons and images from the Byzantine East.<sup>21</sup>

While this argument holds for the earliest *vita* images, it fails to account for the reasons why the format should have been used into the second half of the duecento, when Francis's fame was sufficiently widespread and his saintly status secure. I posit that the Franciscans appropriated the format as one specifically suited to the representation of their

exceptional founder. There exist images prior to the Berlinghieri panel that display a holy figure flanked by narrative scenes.<sup>22</sup> But the most sustained use of the format is evident among the Franciscans. The reasons for this, I argue, are related to the difficulties the Order and its adherents faced in describing the *alter Christus*'s physical being. This is reflected by the fact that several of the scenes on the Franciscan panels depict episodes from the saint's afterlife, when his body takes the form of a relic shrine. The altar and cloth constituting the shrine stand in for Francis's body and, again, allude to the complex interplay of the interior and the exterior, the body covered and uncovered, that writers and artists consistently resorted to in depicting the saint. In this respect, the Franciscan *vita* images differ vastly from the Byzantine ones, which concentrate on the earthly lives of the saints in question and close the narrative with the death of the holy one.

But the Franciscan panels do betray similarities with their Byzantine precursors in two important ways: first, they urge the viewer into an awareness of the shifting ontological identities of the *alter Christus* all across the frame as his figure denotes a living body, a vision, and a relic in succession. Second, just as the Byzantine panels illuminate the tensions of their contemporary visual discourse, transposing in paint some of the themes explored in hagiographic texts, so too the Franciscan images follow the rhetorical strategies of Franciscan literature explored in the previous chapter. The juxtaposition of a portrait and narrative scenes permits the enactment of the rhythms of revelation and concealment so critical to the mimetic representation of Francis, and to the viewer's gradually unfolding apprehension of the "secrets" that defined the *alter Christus*'s life and person.

### Bonaventura Berlinghieri's Stigmata

If we turn our eyes to the panel painting by Bonaventura Berlinghieri, signed and dated to the year 1235, we find precisely such a dynamic of ostensible revelation tempered by acknowledgment of a secret grace bestowed (Plate III). The image seems direct, even simplistic. The saint towers in the center, grim, austere, and "uncompromisingly fiery."<sup>23</sup> Emphatic rhythms of light and shadow are orchestrated in his hands and feet in order to proclaim the wounds. These appear in the center of

both feet at the cusp where the lighted background fades into darkness. The wounds slide over the lit and shaded surfaces. For all its crisp contouring, the wound on the right hand appears to float in light, barely grazing the edge of the darkened crescent staining the palm downward from the thumb. On the left hand, it is outlined with firm concision, almost spotlit, with no hint of shading in its immediate proximity.

While their background surfaces vary remarkably, the wounds themselves are disappointingly staid. By depicting them as tame perforations, the panel betrays a tremendous divergence from the biographies that supposedly inspired it. Although the graphic depiction of the stigmata was by no means a commonplace in this period, and so the “perforations” on Francis’s body might not necessarily have appeared bland to a contemporary audience, they must be considered within the context of their importance to the Franciscan Order and the careful consideration that must have gone into their representation, both textual and pictorial. In this light, it is certainly worth questioning the effects that the stark differences in the written and painted versions of the stigmata might have had upon their audience, particularly one that consumed both media in tandem.

The official hagiography of Francis in use in 1235 was the *Vita Prima* by Thomas of Celano. (The *Life of Francis* by Julian of Speyer and the *Legend for Use in the Choir* were also prevalent, but since they derive their descriptions of the stigmata from the *Vita Prima*, I shall focus on the latter text as the point of reference.) The near-geometric forms of the painted wounds on the panel contain the uneven, crude landscape evoked in the *Vita Prima*, flattening it into a harmonious set of coordinates. Although the viewer is privy only to the “inner part of the hands” and “upper part of the feet” where “the marks were round,” there is no indication that these marks were “raised from the flesh” or that they disrupted the surfaces on which they occurred.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, where the *Vita Prima* made sure to impress the fact that the appearance of the wounds differed on each side of the organs on which they were inscribed – on the front and the soles of the feet, on the palms and the backs of the hands, and on the side – on the panel they are more or less the same on hands and feet, almost interchangeably so.

As for the side wound, which even Thomas did not engage with the degree of passionate detail he reserved for those on the hands and

feet – there is no hint of it at all. The folds of Francis’s robe are drawn in multiple dark lines, but the body beneath is flat, barely communicating the site of a bruise staining the cloth above and occasioning pain. But even though the image differs in these technical details, its larger aim coincides with that of the text. It displays the stigmatized body as an organized entity, the stigmata as replicable motifs. They resemble the verbal conceit of the “little black stones” described by Thomas at Francis’s funeral<sup>25</sup> – an image which, we recall, served to layer over and conceal the saint’s personal experience of the wounds.

This reading goes against the deeply ingrained notion of Franciscan investment in narrative clarity and action, both in textual forms, such as sermons and biographies, and in images – a clarity, moreover, that is believed to have been responsible for inciting an emphatically Franciscan mode of affective response.<sup>26</sup> These views must be nuanced in relation to our panel. It is the fundamental reticence of Francis’s body that comes across, especially in its comparison with those exemplars of affective piety – the painted crosses depicting Christ crucified from the duecento. Scholars have noted a resemblance between the crosses and the biographical panels of Francis, arguing that the superficial similarity of their formats sustains the saint’s status as the *alter Christus*.<sup>27</sup> Positioned atop the rood screen separating the sanctuary from the nave, or in the center of the apse, the crosses were often embellished with *tabellone* or flanking aprons depicting scenes from the life of Christ, particularly the Passion cycle. As Anne Derbes has pointed out, a perusal of the Passion scenes on the aprons leads insistently, and inevitably, to the figure of Christ on the cross. The events that led to this state and to its aftermath must be read across the wounded, divine body that towers as a bridge between cause and miraculous effect.<sup>28</sup>

The figure of Christ on the cross, however, is a symbol of generosity; a divine being who reveals his humiliation for all to see. Even if Christ’s wounds are not depicted in graphic detail, the emphasis on the cross as the background to which his body is affixed signals suffering. This theme, of course, is the informing motif of the crosses depicting *Christus Patiens*.<sup>29</sup> Rather than conforming to the crosses, the Berlinghieri image revokes the very terms that define them. On the panel, Francis is depicted in mendicant robes that tantalizingly hint at, but veil, any suggestion of his physique. The layered nature of the saint’s composition is further evident

in the position of his right hand, acting as a second barrier along with his robe between the viewer and the hidden side wound. The stigmatized right hand, in fact, may be argued to substitute for the side wound on the panel.<sup>30</sup> Where the painted cross opens and unveils Christ's suffering body, the Berlinghieri panel displays a uniform configuration within a layered matrix rather than a body.

This last point may be better illustrated by a verse from the *Sanctitatis Nova Signa* attributed to Thomas of Celano. One portion of the sequence claims:

Thus was that holy body signed;  
 To hand and foot were wounds consigned;  
 Transfixed appeared the right-hand side,  
 That all the while blood had dyed.  
 ...  
 No instruments of skill were used  
 To carve out those limbs' apertures;  
 Nor were the dug out holes nature's,  
 Nor from mallet's cruel weight.<sup>31</sup>

In contrast to the verse that asserts Francis's wounds as having no source in art or nature, in instrument or mallet, the Berlinghieri panel openly avows the artificiality of its four impressed marks. It does so in order to emphasize the miraculous nature of the actual stigmatization upon its audience, an act whose consequences cannot be captured by any earthly instrument. When an image purports to depict it, it must inevitably signal its status, and that of the stigmata, as ornamental representations that necessarily fall short of the original.

The panel underpins the theme of artifice by introducing an explicitly manufactured object, the book (presumably a Gospel). Its cover is embellished by a vermilion-pointed diamond further enclosed by a series of four tiny circles that form a rectangle. Positioned in a vertical axis, the circles trace a path directly to the circle imprinted on Francis's hand holding the book. Along their horizontal axis, the circles lead inexorably to their formal counterpart imprinted on Francis's right hand. Although on both hands the wound falls ever so slightly out of the path of the circles, the conceit of visual artifice via the painted stigmata aligns itself with the notion of rhetorical artifice via the painted book. This may extend to the rhetorical framework of the *Vita Prima*, in which the

stigmata are initially described in gruesome detail but are ultimately uncovered to the eyes of the world as decorative devices. Francis's stigmata imitate, and thus assume the status of, an ornamental motif that layers over the saint's primary experience of them.

The links between the stigmata and the embellishments on the book, in fact, go beyond the formal. Indeed, the very inclusion of such a sumptuous object might be considered an anomaly when read in light of the Franciscan Order's conflicted attitude toward the possession of books. The annual chapter of 1220 decreed that friars were not to have books and that novices were not to keep a psalter, although the *Regula non bullata* of 1221 allowed lay brothers to own psalters.<sup>32</sup> The enormous financial investment in the production of books in the medieval era was seen as inimical to an Order devoted to the ideal of poverty, and Francis himself betrayed a decided antipathy to books, according to certain accounts.<sup>33</sup> Why, then, do the *vita* panels consistently show Francis clutching a book, and in some cases, a lavish one?

I propose that these painted manuscripts, positioned right in front of Francis's gaunt, ascetic body like armor, function as analogs of that body itself, just as their decoration sometimes functions as analogs of the stigmata. Neslihan Şenocak observes that, for Francis, learning letters was subordinate to living the life of Christ and that pious humble action was prized by the *poverello* rather than knowledge of it.<sup>34</sup> The book in the panel is the counterpart to the body, which, in its living form, enacts the teachings included between the covers. The material shape of the book bolsters this claim. It is particularly interesting, for instance, that the book is bound, since binding in the duecento and beyond was by no means a given. As John Ahern remarks, in certain circumstances binding was regarded as a hindrance to the wider circulation of texts.<sup>35</sup> University booksellers were required to stock unbound exemplars so as to enable access to several readers. Indeed, Bonaventure mentions Francis as having taken apart the binding of a New Testament precisely so that a number of friars could read it simultaneously.<sup>36</sup> The beautifully bound and ornamented book in the image, therefore, is the very opposite of the unbound manuscript. It is exclusive, and its contents are carefully protected from the needs facilitating mass consumption, like Francis's body.

As mentioned earlier, that body was regarded as a document, a text signed and sealed by the finger of God.<sup>37</sup> The textual metaphor served to

present Francis as a divinely wrought charter for the foundation of the Franciscan Order; no doubt, this accounts for the further development of the theme in later biographies of the saint. At a more fundamental level, however, the book also reflects the manufactured nature of Francis's real body, wrought by the divine through the application or insertion of the stigmata on it. Just as the book is a manufactured entity, so too is the stigmatized body of Francis a crafted artifact, although in his case the nature of the artifact is deeply ambivalent (as discussed in the previous chapter). The panel in Pescia, on the other hand, is made by Bonaventura Berlinghieri, who literally bears witness to the miraculous document into which Francis's body was wrought. The panel is Berlinghieri's own inscription of that body – the document – in the medium that forms the basis of his craft – the panel.

### Causes and Effects

The scenes flanking Francis's body imitate the repetitive regularity of the painted stigmata and extend the insights enforced by the latter. They lead the viewer into a series of encounters where vision is progressively sharpened or diminished according to the demands of the context. In the process, they highlight the possibilities and limits of that faculty in relation to Francis, along with its implications for the issues of witness and representation.

These vignettes are contained within spacious rectangles with rigidly vertical alignments, accentuated by the soaring pediments of the buildings gracing them. Victor Lasareff pointed out that the leaf-pattern sprawling across these edifices in their neat rectangular bands were Byzantine, or purely "Greek" in style.<sup>38</sup> Ernst H. Gombrich developed the notion further, arguing that these beautiful "palmette scrolls" suggested an acquaintance with the original Greek versions. According to Gombrich, "the scroll from which they spring swings much more freely – again like the Greek scroll – and the freedom and elegance with which the space is filled, the relation between figure and ground, appears to justify the first impression of a Greek 'physiognomy.'"<sup>39</sup> Of interest here is the description of the palmette scroll in all its intricacy, its mesmerizing play of figure and ground in which the one seems to merge into the other. Their counterpart would seem to be the motif of the stigmata. In their

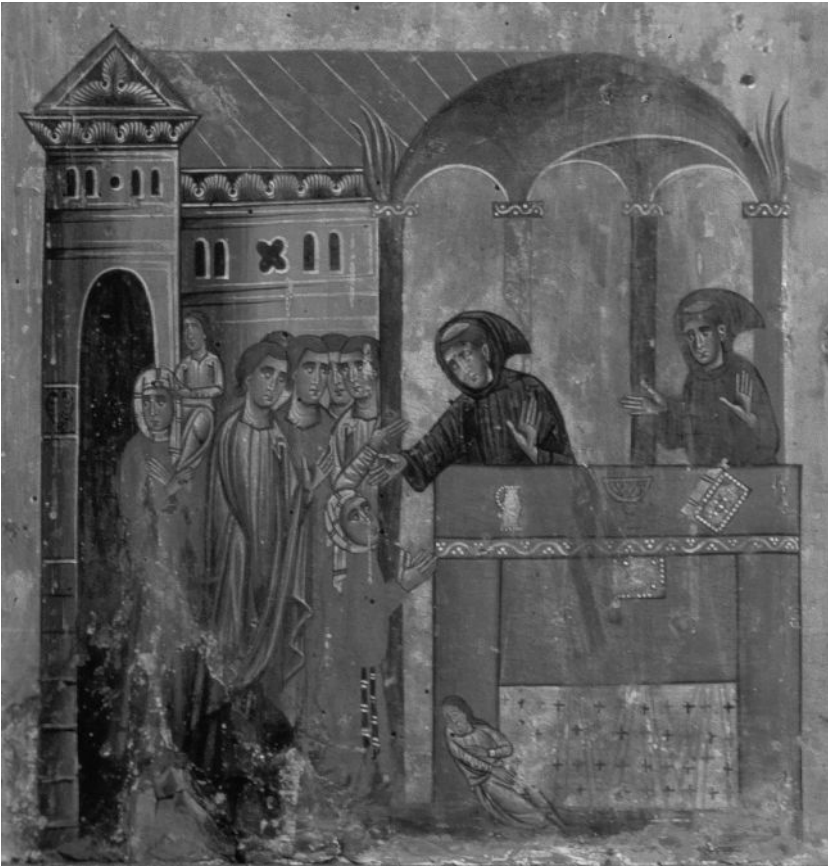
case, figure and ground are emphasized as distinct surfaces in the *Vita Prima*, but on the panel the wounds seem to merge seamlessly with the flesh. Just as the ornamental frieze recurs on the architectural backdrops in four of the scenes, so in the five scenes where the figure of Francis appears, the stigmata recur as a parallel, repeating motif, once again underlining their ornamental status.

The scenes ingeniously develop the enigma of the figure presiding in their midst. Depicting arguably the most difficult moment of Francis's life in the episode at the top left when he encountered the seraph and received the stigmata, the panel moves below to yet another richly strange encounter: that of Francis and the birds to whom he preached.<sup>40</sup> The four remaining scenes depict the more mundane dimensions of his sanctity in the form of healing miracles, as though the panel had already exhausted its capacity for displaying the events that made Francis the singular man he was.<sup>41</sup> And yet it is precisely in the composition and content of these "routine" episodes that a viewer understands that singularity.

Take the scene at bottom left, for instance, which depicts one of the very first miracles performed at Francis's shrine in Assisi (Fig. 23). The case of the girl with the twisted neck who was cured when she lay under the saint's tomb is a typically medieval tale of deformity corrected by divine touch.<sup>42</sup> The scene depicts the little girl, a doll-like figure, lying aslant below the altar table over which two Franciscan friars preside. A jug (presumably a chalice) and a book enliven its rectangle. A motley crowd is arrayed at the outer precinct of the altar. One young man grips the column that separates the friars from the onlookers. He is the spitting image of the other members of the small crowd, all of whom are clones of each other, except for the girl's mother, who differs only in her clothing and the scarf covering her head.

The mother and the girl are shown twice: when the mother kneels at the altar, her hands held out in prayer with her daughter lying by the tomb, and when the mother stands erect on the left edge of the scene, daughter cured and perched stiffly on her shoulder, ready to make a joyful exit through the gaping black archway. The scene conveys various themes with admirable economy. It relays a "before" and "after" scenario<sup>43</sup> in which an affliction is intimated along with its cure, the figures repeated in two distinct postures while the agent of change – Francis's





23. The cure of the girl with the twisted neck (detail), St. Francis and scenes from his life and afterlife, by Bonaventura Berlinghieri, 1235, Pescia, Italy. Courtesy of Art Resource, NY.

tomb at the altar – forms the focus for the crowd. The figure of the mother kneeling in prayer is aligned almost exactly with the figure of Francis in the scene at the very top in which he kneels to the vision of the seraph.<sup>44</sup> But the reason for the mother's plea for help and her subsequent reward are revealed in the bottom scene. In the top scene, in contrast, cause and effect remain enigmatic (Fig. 24). Francis's hands and feet are marked, but nothing induces or enables the viewer to relate those marks to his encounter with the seraph.<sup>45</sup> This creature, composed of six wings, stares resolutely ahead instead of looking "kindly and graciously" on Francis as per Thomas's account.<sup>46</sup> A thin ray of gold streams down from the seraph and touches the tip of Francis's halo, but



24. The stigmatization of St. Francis (detail), St. Francis and scenes from his life and afterlife, by Bonaventura Berlinghieri, 1235, Pescia, Italy. Courtesy of Art Resource, NY.

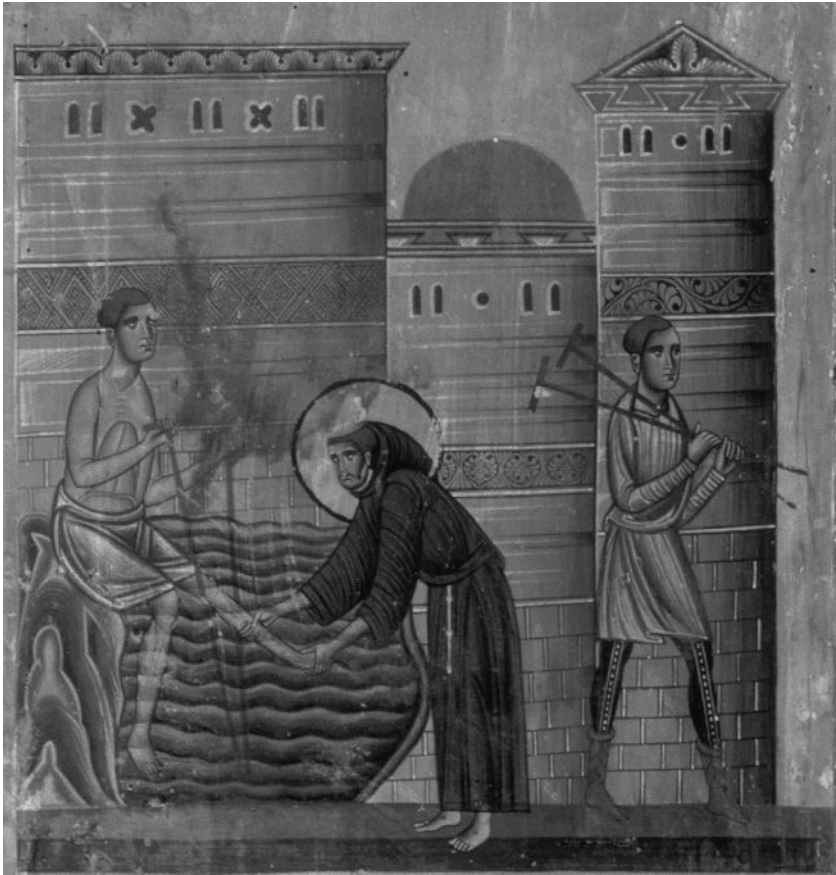
the contact is tenuous at best, unlike in later versions of the scene in which darting rays join the saint's hands, feet, and side to those of the vision.<sup>47</sup> In our scene, one may be forgiven for imagining the stigmatization as an event prior to Francis's encounter with the seraph, since the image sustains no visible links between them other than Francis's gesture of prayer.

The simplicity of the scene of the stigmatization thus pivots on its critical elision of cause and effect and its suppression of pictorial doubling. Francis is conspicuously alone. The bottom scene is hectic in contrast. It is not only the mother and daughter who are depicted twice but also the crowd that witnesses the chain of events. Ostensibly

a group of multiple figures, their uniform countenances and tightly packed bodies convey anonymity and an identity that is singly monolithic for all their numbers. Their double is the viewer, positioned like them at the edge of the scene, but unlike them, outside the surface of the panel, watching the events depicted, perhaps sidling up close to the image like the man clutching the column, perhaps even throwing up a hand in surprised exclamation like his counterpart. One may even imagine that the two men are, in fact, one person; that the figure who raises his hand while watching the miracle has later shifted his position to the column to watch the woman stride out with her daughter. The depicted onlookers (whether the same person or different people) thus serve as temporal markers who punctuate the essential stages of the miracle, guiding us to its successful culmination. These markers are strikingly absent from the scene of the stigmatization.

Even when no witnesses are depicted, such as in the second scene in the column on the right, the “before” and “after” conditions are clear (Fig. 25). Here, a man sits in a bath with crutches in his hand. Francis tends to his broken leg. At the edge of the panel on the right, we find the man striding off, crutches lifted insouciantly over his shoulders and crossed in a statement of their uselessness when his legs carry out their function instead. Francis, positioned in the middle of the scene, effects the cure that allows the man to walk.<sup>48</sup> The viewer is capable of deciphering the sequence without a guide.

However, the scene's counterpart – the second scene in the column on the left of the panel – is more enigmatic and brings together two different, even conflicting, representational strategies (Fig. 26). The scene shows Francis's famous conversation with the birds. While journeying through the valley of Spoleto, Francis had greeted and then preached to them. Thomas of Celano claims that there were doves, crows, and other related species in the audience, which Chiara Frugoni has interpreted as a delineation of the varied strata of medieval society.<sup>49</sup> In the scene on the panel the birds are almost uniformly black in color but of different sizes. Rosalind B. Brooke identifies them as crows and rooks, picking out the two perched on the lowest branches as “recognizable magpies.”<sup>50</sup> This observation of Brooke's is telling; it implies a level of naturalism and eye for detail in the depiction of Francis's feathered audience such that a particular avian species is still identifiable to scholars today. In contrast,



25. The cure of the crippled man (detail), St. Francis and scenes from his life and afterlife, by Bonaventura Berlinghieri, 1235, Pescia, Italy. Courtesy of Art Resource, NY.

the protagonist of the panel, Francis, is depicted in a mode not drawn from observation. Indeed, four of the six miracles depicted were performed posthumously, and the stigmatization was an event without witnesses. Thus, two distinct modes of representation are implicitly juxtaposed in this scene: one that replicates, or purports to replicate, the birds from actual observation, and another that signals Francis's figure as expressly devoid of such scrutiny and, therefore, an enigma despite its depiction.<sup>51</sup>

The figure of Francis is aligned with his kneeling figure in the scene above and the mother of the girl with the twisted neck below. All three figures maintain the attitude of address or response to an interlocutor, but the element of mystery pervading the scenes differs in degree. Where



26. The preaching to the birds (detail), St. Francis and scenes from his life and afterlife, by Bonaventura Berlinghieri, 1235, Pescia, Italy. Courtesy of Art Resource, NY.

the top scene omits critical details even as it depicts Francis's vision of the seraph, the second scene includes onlookers – the Franciscan friars – as a means of clarifying the (relatively) public nature of this particular event. The final scene unfolds with complete clarity, not only to the friars and the watching laypeople but also to the viewer of the entire panel. This viewer takes in the enigma of the living body of Francis as it was altered at La Verna in juxtaposition with other mundane bodies and events – the miraculous in conjunction with the explicable.

The two remaining scenes on the panel extend the themes of the visible and invisible and the viewer's access to both in innovative ways. In so doing, they underscore the contrasting positions that the viewer must assume at distinct sites of the panel. At the top of the right-hand



27. The miracle of the pear (detail), St. Francis and scenes from his life and afterlife, by Bonaventura Berlinghieri, 1235, Pescia, Italy. Courtesy of Art Resource, NY.

column, a youth kneels and stretches out a hand to a friar identified as a young and less hirsute version of Francis (Fig. 27).<sup>52</sup> This scene depicts the curing of a cripple at Francis's shrine, when the saint appeared to him in a vision and handed him a pear. The thrust of the composition tends gently to the right, pulled along by the play of various hands to the edge where two standing men gesture to an unseen presence. This is the only portion of the panel that turns away from the center for no obvious reason. The interaction engaged by the two men is extraneous to the event depicted. It stands as a clause to the visible and tactile encounter depicted between the afflicted man and the saint. What might be its significance?

When we consider that its counterpart on the left is the episode of the stigmatization (Fig. 24), this scene assumes the role of its analogue. Both

touch on the subject of an encounter, but the expected parameters in each case are reversed. Francis and the seraph are separated by a luxuriant landscape and a horizon soaked in gold. The area between them appears innocuously quotidian but is laden with sacred grace, much like images of the Annunciation in which the angel approaches the bashfully recoiling Virgin with a greeting and a message of salvation. These dialogues convey the richly expectant, weighted quality of the space between the interlocutors, imbuing it with a profound significance that the viewer immediately apprehends, even if total comprehension of it eludes and – indeed, must elude – him or her.<sup>53</sup>

Moving horizontally away from the stigmatization to the right, we see an immediate, tactile encounter between a kneeling youth and Francis (Fig. 27). Beyond this are the two young men, engaged in some sort of dialogue at the edge of the panel. Although not pictured, the space in which their interlocutor is positioned would seem to spill over outside the image into the space of the viewer. I argued earlier that the vertical arrangement of the scenes in the left column displays degrees of revelation. So too a horizontal reading of the scenes at the top discloses the gradual inclusion of the mortal world and the viewer. Francis's vision of the seraph is depicted for all to see in the scene of the stigmatization, but nobody can participate in that extraordinary event nor claim understanding of it. In contrast, the mundane encounter at the opposite extremity of the panel is visualized as an enigma, but such that the invisible half is located in the viewer's space and is, therefore, comprehensible to him. A point is made about how the representational strategies of the panel construe a viewer. In the first case, the depiction of an event does *not* automatically implicate the viewer as witness to it. In the second case, the absence of depiction – the gap between the actions of the two men and their invisible interlocutor – would seem to embrace the possibility of the viewer's participation.

The final scene at the bottom of the panel reiterates this theme (Fig. 28). Winged black demons fly out of the open mouths of the possessed, now cured at Francis's shrine.<sup>54</sup> An internal disease is on display, as is its dispelling. One young man lifts his hand and points upward in a gesture that leads to the main figure of Francis at the center of the panel and perhaps beyond, to the scene of the stigmatization. This chiasmic movement links the saint's marked, enigmatic body at one end of the panel with its counterparts at the opposite end where the bodies



28. The cure of the demoniacs (detail), St. Francis and scenes from his life and afterlife, by Bonaventura Berlinghieri, 1235, Pescia, Italy. Courtesy of Art Resource, NY.

are emptied of their interior, hidden torments and are exposed to the gaze. One young woman stands naked to the waist, breasts bared. The stance is reminiscent of Francis's own public abandonment of clothes in his youth, the display of his nakedness then conveying the extent of his spiritual ardor to the amazed citizens of Assisi.<sup>55</sup> His concealment of that body in old age, when it was marked by the most transcendent signs of divine acceptance, constitutes a decisive turning away from the impetuous act of his younger days, a conscious preservation of the physical self from its surroundings that is echoed by the panel. Specifically, the bust of the half-naked patient highlights the contrast to Francis's covered chest and the wound therein that was the ultimate seal of his physical assimilation to Christ.



It is surely significant that the Berlinghieri panel is among the earliest examples of that intriguing object known as the altarpiece.<sup>56</sup> Hellmut Hager's classic study on Italian altarpieces suggests that the Franciscan panels, such as the one by Berlinghieri, were initially located on side altars before assuming their place on the high altar of the church.<sup>57</sup> Klaus Krüger on the other hand argues that the panels moved through two distinct stages: first, when they were positioned on the high altar as portable objects on the feast and octave of the saint; second, when they were stationed permanently on the high altar.<sup>58</sup> More recently, Beth Williamson's examination of a variety of altarpieces both reinforces and clarifies Hager's and Krüger's separate studies.<sup>59</sup> Using several different examples, Williamson convincingly demonstrates the spatial, physical, and temporal flexibility of the altarpiece in relation to an altar, be it the high altar of a church or a side altar in a subsidiary chapel. The fact that both Hager and Krüger define the Franciscan panels as portable altarpieces at different stages of their histories indicates, ironically, the essential autonomy of this object from the unit of the altar in which it was positioned. Not necessarily an indicator of relics, or marking tombs, or containing uniquely Eucharistic references, the altarpiece is nonetheless defined by its proximity to an altar and its associations, even though as a portable object it was often detached from this space. As a functional object, it can assume diverse roles such as labeling an altar by depicting the subject to which it might be dedicated, commemorating the presence of a holy person regardless of his or her physical absence, and defining the site of a cult associated with the holy.

The Berlinghieri panel could plausibly have appeared on the high altar or a side altar. It could also have plausibly carried out all the functions of an altarpiece regardless of its location, whether portable or permanent.<sup>60</sup> Half the miracles depicted on it occur by an altar with liturgical materials and in the presence of Franciscan friars. And yet three of the miracles take place in open landscapes. If the panel engages in a degree of self-reflexiveness by depicting the accoutrements of an altar, at or near which it would have been positioned, it also steers attention away from such a compact space to exterior vistas devoid of clerical attention that are equally, if not more, capable of encompassing miraculous grace. In doing so, the panel reflects its own value as both an image and an image-bearing object.<sup>61</sup> Consequently, it reiterates the question

(explored in the previous chapter) about Francis's status as an image, or a support for images. The panel in its entirety imitates not Francis's body but the problems which that body posed for those engaged in its depiction. Furthermore, it confesses its inability to display the image of Francis as anything other than a controlled, mimetic representation, even as it avows its own paucity as an object – an altarpiece – to embrace the spectrum of Francis's saintly powers.

Last but not least, this cunningly composed panel extends its sleights of hand (literally) to incorporate the hand of the one who painted it. The name of the artist, Bonaventura Berlinghieri, winds its way in verticals and curlicues, now largely effaced, below Francis's feet (Plate III). The authorial inscription announces its claim to witness much in the manner that Thomas's *Vita Prima* does. More appropriately, Berlinghieri here assumes the role of yet *another* witness, one who does not simply receive the teaching of Francis's life as transmitted by Thomas but who crafts it into a tangible material product in order to ensure that others, in their turn, will bear witness to it.<sup>62</sup> Berlinghieri's panel propagates the act of bearing witness that Thomas's biography enshrines textually, even though both works are careful to acknowledge the impossibility of their having accomplished an accurate rendering of Francis's body. Prominently inscribed under that body is the panel's date of manufacture. This begins at the far right of Francis's right foot, continues between his feet, then skips over Francis's left foot to stretch all the way to the edge of the rectangle. The dark ground enables the gold lettering to stand out in its brilliance. It appears as the calligraphic remains of the golden backdrop that is suddenly transformed into the dark, rectangular support for the saint's feet. Just above the "C" of "MCE" is a fairly large golden circle in near-perfect horizontal alignment with the stigmata on Francis's feet. The inscription that signals the date of manufacture leaves a residue that resembles the stigmata and thus assimilates them into the handiwork of Bonaventura Berlinghieri. The golden circle seals the artifice of Francis's image, rendering it as no more than a carefully crafted artifact.

### The General and the Particular: The Bardi Panel

If the date of manufacture of the Berlinghieri image is secure, the panel by the hand of the so-called Bardi Master, located in the Bardi Chapel of

the Franciscan church of S. Croce in Florence, is decidedly its opposite. This image has sparked as many questions over its date as it has admiration over the depth of its detail (Plate XIII).<sup>63</sup> Rosalind Brooke has observed that Francis's right hand raised in blessing emulates that of Christ in Byzantine icons.<sup>64</sup> The side wound is not visualized; the stigmata are depicted only on the hands and feet. Two angels hold a scroll above Francis with the proclamation: *Hunc exaudite perhibentem dogmata vite*, or "Heed him presenting the dogma of life." Fourteen scenes flank Francis on either side and across the bottom of the panel, making it the most complete depiction of his life and miracles.<sup>65</sup>

The conflicts over dating the Bardi panel (ranging from the 1240s to the 1260s) pivot primarily on two factors: the texts from which it is believed to have been inspired, and its perceived Spiritualist bias. The debates over whether the scenes depicted draw from Thomas of Celano's various *Lives* or Bonaventure's *Legenda Maior* has complicated the question of when the panel was made and the message(s) it wishes to impart. In addition to this, the suggestions of various scholars regarding the Spiritualist cast of the panel have further muddled the issue. For instance, E. J. Stein suggests that it was commissioned while the "Spiritual," John of Parma, was minister general between 1245 and 1257, because of depictions of Francis taking off his shoes and his concern for lambs.<sup>66</sup> Chiara Frugoni argues in a similar vein, remarking that the panel portrays the Francis of the *zelanti*, the forerunners of the Spirituals, as does Rona Goffen.<sup>67</sup> Some scholars, however, have observed that the factions within the Franciscan Order did not emerge as coherent forces until well after Bonaventure's death and that the party labels "Spiritual" and "Conventual" are anachronistic when applied in the first half of the duecento. Indeed, Brooke remarks that it would be "misleading to view the narrative scenes of the Bardi panel in a polemical context."<sup>68</sup>

In my view, the question of whether the panel presents the vehemently ascetic Francis of the Spiritualists or a more balanced founder has exercised the scholarly imagination far more than is necessary for its interpretation; similarly, the hunt for the appropriate text from which it derives has obscured certain basic insights. For one, it is clear that duecento artists (and their patrons) did not strictly adhere to textual sources; a look at images of the miracle of the crib at Greccio is sufficient

proof of this (as will be discussed in more detail). Second, it makes more sense, perhaps, to ask *why* the panel combines themes particular to Francis's life, such as his abandonment of clothing at Assisi, the episode of the miracle at Greccio, and his stigmatization, with general Franciscan ideals such as care of the sick, missionary activity, and the importance of preaching. My argument builds on the play between the general and the particular evident on the panel (this dichotomy is precisely what seems to have sparked the debates on dating) but not so as to isolate a few characteristics in order to read a coherent program at the expense of the others. Rather, I suggest that it is in the juxtaposition of the general and the particular that we detect a vigorous commentary on imitative practice, which is the fundamental attribute of the would-be saint. Indeed, the leitmotif of imitation is explicitly announced by the scroll at the apex of the image, exhorting the viewer "*exaudite,*" or to "heed," or "comply with."

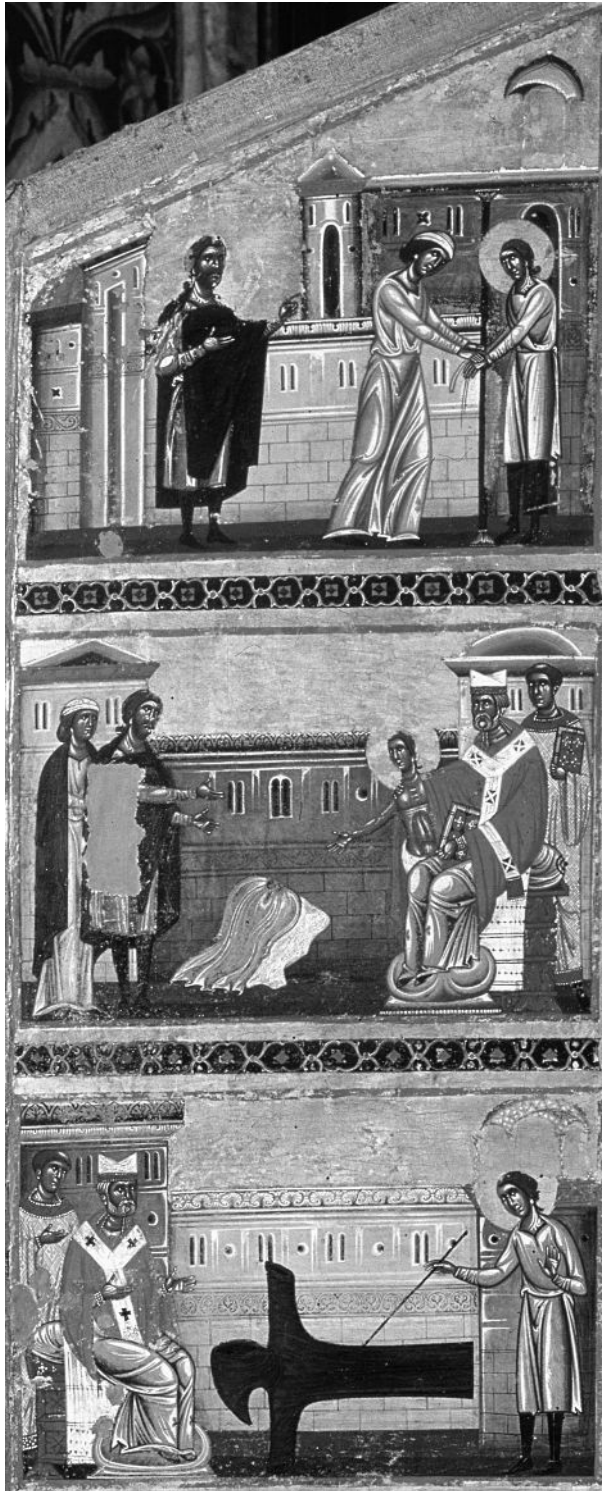
The issue of imitation would have remained critical to the Franciscan Order whether the panel were produced in the 1240s or the 1260s because, in Francis's case, it becomes a fraught affair. Grounded in a vision granted to him alone, the mimesis of Christ that follows is not repeatable or explicable. Following in this vein, the Bardi panel depicts episodes in the life of Francis that pair the imitable and its opposite in imaginative ways. It is through the viewer's faculties of vision that the contrasts between the normative and unprecedented modes of saintly emulation are discerned; hence, vision itself is harnessed in the judging and weighing of different kinds of imitative practice. Last, but not least, a close reading of the image discloses that a large number of scenes, along with their position on the frame, enjoin a specifically Franciscan visuality upon the viewer, and one that accords in important ways with that propounded by Francis himself. The beholder is invited to perform an act of viewing informed by the imitation of Franciscan precepts, in the process of which he or she encounters other (expected and unexpected) forms of imitation.

Central to this panel's ambitious agenda is the theme of clothing, which recurs in several scenes. The dual role of the Franciscan habit as signifier of Francis's body and as the signified (i.e., as clothing itself) resembles the stigmata in their oscillation between sign and referent as evident in Franciscan texts explored in the previous chapter. The motif of

clothing recurs intermittently in the so-called *Assisi Compilation*, which presents anecdotes about Francis from those friars who regularly associated with him.<sup>69</sup> There are difficulties in identifying an exact date for this text, which seems to have been composed between the 1240s and 1260s. As has been noted, “The *Assisi Compilation* remains . . . puzzling,” not least because of its contradictions; it presents Francis on the one hand as tolerant of various practices of the friars and on the other as “harsh, judgemental, and abrupt.”<sup>70</sup> The text, then, would appear to combine the polarities scholars have detected in the presentation of Francis as the uncompromising ascetic or the more reasonable founder of the Order.<sup>71</sup> I suggest that along with the expression of these tensions, the text furnishes a glimpse into the ways in which a familiar iconographic motif – the habit – is transformed into a dynamic symbol; a transformation evident in other texts as well, such as in Thomas of Celano’s *Vita Secunda*.<sup>72</sup> The habit encapsulates the oscillation between the general and the particular that informs Francis’s own injunctions to his Order regarding a uniquely Franciscan vision.

The scene at the top left of the Bardi panel opens the cycle (Fig. 29). It depicts Francis’s mother releasing her son from the bonds imposed on him by his father; the father steps in from the opposite end, denouncing his wife’s treachery. The psychological and physical distance between the parents is evident from the bare space between them, spanned by a brick wall. The second scene shows Francis’s rejection of his clothes and his father’s profession.<sup>73</sup> The garments take center stage, filling in the small blank space of the scene above. They lie huddled in a heap of blue and white layers between the crowd of amazed citizens at one end and Francis and the bishop of Assisi at the other. The bishop gently covers Francis’s lower half with his own cloak. Significantly, Francis’s torso is bare – a clean surface that awaits God’s signature. It stands in contrast to the heavily garbed figure, sealed by God’s hand, at the center of the panel.

The episode directly below depicts the garment that will henceforth become Francis’s (Fig. 29). The holy man (now clothed) draws the design of the habit and shows it to the bishop, seated at the opposite end of the rectangle. Once again, clothing dominates the center and occupies a considerable spatial expanse. The habit lies in a horizontal axis, complete with cowl and outstretched arms in the form of an inverted cross, or the letter *tau*. It resembles (rather eerily) a human figure, although it is



29. St. Francis released by his mother; St. Francis renouncing his goods; St. Francis tracing the habit (details), Bardis panel, Florence, Italy. Courtesy of the Bridgeman Art Library, New York.

devoid of a body.<sup>74</sup> The literal significance of the scene encompasses a figurative dimension; one in which the clothes make – and alter – the man. The general design pushed forward by Francis and later worn by his followers (in other scenes on the panel) assumes a particular and unique resonance when it cloaks the body of the *alter Christus*. Whereas in the case of the friars the habit signals their allegiance to Francis and the principles expounded by him, in Francis's case it is transformed into a shield, hiding his side wound from the world even as it makes tactile contact with the blood oozing from it. Francis's habit, in other words, is privileged in a way that the saint's own followers are not. It is permitted a degree of proximity with his stigmatized body that outsiders are either strictly denied or allowed only partial access to. The fact that this scene (and the ones preceding it) lie on a vertical axis adjacent to the figure of Francis at the center of the panel only reinforces the differences between the saint's body (clothed and unclothed) before the stigmatization and what it becomes after that momentous event.

A constellation of four scenes at the bottom center alludes to the issues of concealment and revelation as mediated by the Franciscan habit (Plate XIII). These are flanked on either side by two scenes each depicting Francis's encounters with diverse groups: on the left, we see Francis's conversation with the birds and below it, his meeting with the Islamic theologians at the Egyptian sultan's court. On the right, Francis washes the wounds of the lepers, engaging in an intensely physical contact with them, while below it, Francis appears as a vision during the chapter meeting of the friars at Arles. Each of these scenes is testimony to Francis's involvement in the wider world.

But the four scenes nested within the four preceding episodes are asymmetrical variations on Francis's interactions with people and animals. Directly below Francis's stigmatized left foot (the wound shown as a deep, dark circle) is the scene of the stigmatization. (Plate XIV). Three golden rays join the seraph to the kneeling saint, although the rays do not indicate those parts of Francis's body that received the wounds. To the immediate left is a scene depicting a goatherd with his flock, among which is a lamb. Franciscan friars hover between the rolling hills that constitute the landscape, looking down upon the beasts. The scene refers to the episode recounted in Thomas of Celano's *Vita Prima* when Francis spotted a lamb and identified it as the Son of God. ("Do you see the sheep

walking so meekly among those goats? I tell you, in the same way our Lord Jesus Christ, meek and humble, walked among the Pharisees and chief priests”).<sup>75</sup> Like the depiction of the habit, this scene is also informed by the (sometimes problematic) oscillation between the general and the particular that runs through Francis’s teaching.

According to the *Vita Prima*, the friars were to look for signs of Christ wherever they found themselves. A certain configuration of tree branches, or hedges, for instance, was to remind them of the cross.<sup>76</sup> This insistence on a literal vision of the Gospels, mapped out in nature and in man-made articles, is worth giving some thought to. It enforces a particular visuality upon the friars: one which must impose the contours of Christian iconography upon any object in sight, thereby transforming the profane into the sacred, and the general into the specific. By this logic, a lamb in a field becomes the Lamb of God, and a symbol of Christ’s sacrifice.

The scene directly below depicts a man transporting sheep to market for slaughter. The beasts are tied upside down to his stick as he strides out from the rocks. Francis extends a cloak to the man in exchange for the animals, for he cannot endure the thought of them being killed. Again, the *Vita Prima* records that the cloak which buys the sheep their lives was lent to Francis by a friend to keep out the cold. The aftermath of the story is that Francis returned the sheep to the man, ordering him not to let any harm come to them, but “to preserve, nourish, and guide them carefully.”<sup>77</sup>

To the right of this scene is the fourth and final component of the group. It shows Francis naked except for a loincloth, seated and tied to a pillar, with groups of onlookers on either end. His habit, presumably flung to the ground by its wearer, stands strangely prone and blocklike next to the pillar; a bodiless analogue to the saint, who sits on the other side. This scene alludes to the episode recorded in the *Vita Prima* and the *Legenda Maior* in which Francis sought public castigation for having succumbed to the temptation of eating meat.<sup>78</sup> The scene departs from the specific punishment the holy man sought in the texts; instead of showing him being dragged around by a cord, he has flung off his habit, chained himself to a pillar, and begged to be punished for his sin. As noted by Rosalind Brooke, this scene assimilates Francis to Christ by evoking the latter’s mocking and flagellation.<sup>79</sup>





30. The miracle of the crib at Greccio (detail), Bardi panel, Florence, Italy. Courtesy of the Bridgeman Art Library, New York.

What are we to make of these scenes clustered at the site of the panel most likely to have attracted a high degree of viewer attention, concentrated as they are in the bottom center? Francis's left foot points directly to the scene of the stigmatization: the cause of the perforation on his foot is explained by the saint's exchange with the seraph. However, his right foot, with an equally emphatic wound, is not as "natural" as it appears. Aligned at a sharp right angle to its left counterpart, the feet together form the lower half of a cross; this is underscored by the cross shape of the decorated border that unfolds below them (Plate XIII). If the left foot points unequivocally to the scene of the stigmatization below it, then the right foot points to a scene on the adjoining grid, showing the miracle of the crib at Greccio (Fig. 30).

This episode is a fitting pair to that of the stigmatization as both involve a miraculous vision. In the former, Francis lovingly reconstructs the scene of the Nativity. While the laymen and women and friars sing Christmas hymns, one member of the congregation – a knight by the name of John – sees the Christ Child in the manger. The vision is enabled by the clerical infrastructure within which it is (quite deliberately) positioned, although in the *Vita Prima* and the *Legenda Maior* there is no mention of the event

occurring within a church space. (Both state that “the forest amplifies the cries” of the people, thus negating the church interior.)<sup>80</sup> The scene, on the other hand – and its successors, including the famous depiction by Giotto in the Upper Church of the Basilica of S. Francesco at Assisi – is set within the confines of the house of God. I would argue that there are very good reasons for this pictorial deviation from the texts.

The knight’s vision is presented as a miraculous phenomenon, but one that is inevitably less exalted than the vision of the seraph apprehended by Francis. Furthermore, the former is shown as occurring in a carefully controlled space within the framework of a commentary on literal imitation tied to artistic manufacture. Francis reconstructs the scene of the manger, with live animals, straw, and so forth, just as an artist might recreate scenes from the Gospels in manuscripts and on panels. Beth A. Mulvaney’s reading of the episode at Greccio in the Upper Church of Assisi comments on the literal spatial imitation of a church performed by Giotto’s brush, as is evident in the depiction of the back of the crucifix that hovers above the choir screen and the accoutrements and space of the altar. Furthermore, Mulvaney comments on the ways in which the figures of the friars, the laypeople, and Francis himself stand in for members of the holy family, the shepherds, and the three wise men.<sup>81</sup> The episode of the crib at Greccio, then, is a template for imitative practice, both figurative and literal, extended outside the circle of friars to the lay community. Most importantly, it is a layperson – albeit, a pious one – who receives the vision.

The scene of the stigmatization also depicts a miraculous vision, but the differences between it and the crib at Greccio, in their pictorial versions, are unmistakable. The stigmatization occurs in an open, wild, rocky landscape, far from clerical intervention. It is as unexpected as it is unprecedented; there is no man-made spatial and hierarchical structure framing it. Finally, it is an event that occurs in complete isolation, certainly not privy to the eyes of a layman, and one with lasting consequences for the persona and personhood of the man who receives the vision. The stigmatization, therefore, completely inverts the formal and thematic structures of the scene of the crib at Greccio. Although the latter, on the Bardi panel, depicts the manger on a rocky support with natural vegetation clinging to it, along with an ox and an ass, this outdoor vignette is positioned right below a table (perhaps an altar?) and is framed by

architecture. The scene, thus, juxtaposes elements of the forest setting with that of a church such that the latter dominates and envelopes the scene. In Greccio, a layman is blessed with a vision within the infrastructure of the church, during the process of the re-creation, or imitation, of a Gospel scene. At La Verna, a friar is granted a vision for which there is no blueprint of imitation and in order to replicate which one ran the risk of being denounced as a heretic.

Francis's feet point the viewer to this instructive contrast in imitation. Furthermore, I suggest that parallel to the particular gesture (toward a particular scene) urged by the saint's right and left feet, is a *general directional axis* solicited by their alignment. The right foot, extending all along the bottom line of the rectangle on which it rests, invites the viewer to follow the scenes along their horizontal axis. The left foot similarly invites a vertical perusal of the scenes unfolding below it. Just as the *alter Christus* received the imprint of the cross on his body and desired his followers to trace its contours on natural and manufactured objects, so too one who looks upon this panel must fit the scenes (or at least some of them) into the outline of the cross in order to extract their full meaning. Looking at the Bardi panel is an exercise in tracing the shape of the cross, and thereby assuming a specifically Franciscan lens of viewing.

Let us look, then, at the four scenes as horizontal and vertical pairs forming the arms of a cross (Plate XIV). The stigmatization is positioned directly above the scene of Francis's public chastisement. In both, Francis submits to pain. In the former, the physical torment occasioned by the stigmata is a sign of grace, cherished by the saint. In the latter, the pain is consciously solicited by him as a reminder of his momentary fall from grace. The stigmatization is without witnesses, whereas the scene below depicts several bystanders, hemming in the rectangle on either side. The awesome privacy of the miracle is contrasted with the deliberate spectacle craved by Francis's guilt; a necessary condition to absolve it. Most strikingly, the stigmatization does not clearly show the wounds on Francis's body and omits the side wound altogether by means of his clothing, whereas the scene below shows Francis's body devoid of clothing but for a loincloth.

The status of the habit in this scene requires some discussion. Its formal counterpart would be the third scene from the top in the left grid (Fig. 29), where the design of the habit dominates the narrative. In that scene, however, it is presented as a flat plane floating, even levitating, in space. In

the scene of Francis's castigation, the habit has body and volume, retaining the imprint of the man who has just stepped out of his clothes. The neighboring scene performs a similar maneuver: the cloak held forth by Francis to the man is not limp or flat but possesses depth and mass. Its folds swing, and it appears to have shrouded a human form very recently. The cloak, like the discarded habit on the right, occupies a fairly central axis.

The similarities between the two scenes do not end here: the position of the clothes with respect to their surroundings is also suggestive. In the scene on the right, the habit lies next to a pillar to which its master is tied. In the scene on the left, the cloak stands by a stick to which a pair of sheep are bound. If Francis willed himself to see Christ in a lamb, and if Francis himself was the most perfect and literal imitator of Christ, then the thematic relations tying the scenes together are subtly strengthened. They reflect upon the idea of saintly imitation by depicting Francis in (more or less) the same position as the sheep who, by virtue of their species, cannot but help allude to the Lamb of God, at least to the Franciscan mentality. Once again, the Bardi panel plays upon the precarious boundaries between the general and the particular underlying the ideal Franciscan mindset: its ability to detect Christ, or a specific Christian symbol, within the exemplars of a species. Furthermore, the scenes attest to a type of imitation that is relatively unproblematic, even unremarkable, in its literal extremity. Tying oneself half-naked to a pillar is an act that can be performed, witnessed, depicted in writing and paint, and then repeated by a zealous follower. In contrast, the stigmatization that looms above the two scenes is a phenomenon that exceeds the imitative powers of an ordinary mortal. It may be depicted, even spectacularized, but it can never be repeated.

The scene next to the stigmatization that completes (in a clockwise direction) our analysis of this part of the panel is an unexpected, but appropriate, counterpart to its fellows. Francis receives the vision of the seraph on the right. On the left, he sees Christ in the lamb among the goats, a sign of the one who sacrificed himself on the cross. Even as Francis is alone during the stigmatization, so too he alone among his followers identifies the lamb with Christ. This vision, unlike that of the seraph, is one that he does not keep secret. On the contrary, he exhorts the friars to superimpose the symbols of the son of God on to their surroundings. The panel too strives to impart this tenet to its viewer.

The lamb is visible to the friars, but it is Francis who transforms it from a mere lamb into the Lamb of God. The seraph, on the other hand, does not appear to all and sundry but only to him who has perfected a Christian (here, Franciscan) mode of viewing. But even if the seraph is not available to imperfect eyes, it can still serve as a model of imitation. In the *Vita Prima*, Thomas of Celano parses the very form and figure of the seraph as a template for the cultivation of Christian virtue.<sup>82</sup> Francis's body rises from mundane acts of imitation (such as tying himself to a pillar) to a transcendent one (such as his stigmatization), the consequences of which make that body peculiarly difficult to render in words or images. The seraph's body, in startling contrast, is more comprehensible according to Franciscan writings, even as some of them confound the relations between the seraph and the crucified man. Indeed, whereas those writers employ the trope of contradiction in describing Francis's stigmatized body as explored in the previous chapter, they show no such unease in elaborating upon and attributing various functions to the seraphic body. Thus, in a hierarchy of enigmatic bodies, Francis occupies the highest rung; even the seraph is more susceptible to (clear) description and analysis than he is.

The scenes on the right grid of the Bardi panel shift attention away from the varied states of Francis's body to those of his followers (Fig. 31). The first episode at the top depicts a man with crutches, sitting in a bath, his torso exposed. Francis cures his affliction and the man strides off, discarding his crutches. The scene below depicts a host of half-naked men approaching the altar, their torsos bare, their hands folded together in supplication. This scene has led to different interpretations, but the most common one identifies it as a penitential procession, possibly of the sailors whom Francis rescued from a storm-tossed boat.<sup>83</sup> It is not an episode that we find on other *vita* panels; indeed, it is an odd member of the group even on the Bardi image, as the scene is not, at first glance, directly related to Francis's life. But there must have been good reasons why it should have been included as a counterpart to the scene of Francis's abandonment of his clothes on the left grid.

The second scene on the left depicts a rebellious, naked man among several clothed citizens – one of them garbed as a bishop, no less (Fig. 29). The incident occurs in open air, in full view of the denizens of Assisi, and the bishop's intervention is decidedly unorthodox, presented as a gentle



31. A crippled being cured and a procession of penitents (detail), Bardi panel, Florence, Italy. Courtesy of the Bridgeman Art Library, New York.

shielding of Francis's lower parts from the back. In the scene of the penitents, in contrast, the half-naked contingent is received within a church space, their nakedness sanctioned, and they face the friars at the altar. Like the twin pairs of the scenes of the crib at Greccio and the stigmatization, these two episodes also highlight the contrasts between an exterior space empty of clerical organization, subject to Francis's individuality, and an interior within which numerous (not individual) bodies are subordinated to – and therefore, accepted by – the official representatives of the Catholic Church. The underlying motif of imitation is invoked once again; the penitents perform difficult but eminently possible acts, whereas Francis's throwing off of his clothes at Assisi stands (or at any rate is framed) as a unique moment in the history of devotion.

The episode at the bottom right displays Francis in a manner not visible elsewhere on the panel (Fig. 32). Compressed into a spherical bubble, the saint floats above the congregation of friars gathered at a sermon. This is the miraculous vision of Francis afforded to Brother Monaldo at Arles while Brother Anthony of Padua was preaching about the Crucifixion. The scene departs from the texts in that Francis is not shown in the shape of a cross, as he appeared to Brother Monaldo. His abbreviated form contrasts with the full-length bodies of the friars, solidly positioned on the ground line of the scene.



32. The miraculous vision at Arles (detail), Bardi panel, Florence, Italy. Courtesy of the Bridgeman Art Library, New York.

However, if we scan the figure of Francis at the center of the panel, we discover roundels containing the curved, bust-length shapes of Franciscan friars, punctuating those points of the border where each new scene begins (Plate XIII). As Francis extends a hand in the episode of the vision at Arles, so in these roundels the friars extend a hand (or both hands) outward. These depictions reflect the body of friars without naming any one of them, whereas the bottom scene depicts Francis in an almost exactly similar configuration, but as the fiercely individualistic being that he was. His vision constitutes a miracle and is grounded in a specific moment in time, during a particular chapter meeting. The generic friars who frame their founder's portrait all along the length of the panel are the collective expression of that individual charisma. In this respect, they enact a similar role as the crowd of half-naked penitents who appear in the second scene on the right grid.

The (seemingly) definitive figure of Francis stationed at the center of the Bardi panel is thus flanked by the process of its formation on the left grid and the display of ordinary, mortal bodies unmarked by divine grace on the right grid. Francis himself is subjected to an imaginative and impressive visual and tactile scrutiny in the most comprehensive set of scenes to appear on any *vita* image dedicated to him. The scenes, moreover, are carefully positioned. Intertwined with the chronological narrative (which is somewhat diluted by the time the viewer arrives at the bottom right corner) is a powerful statement concerning the ways in which Francis stood out – as particular symbol in and of Christian history – from his peers, and the reasons behind his individuality. Regardless of the specific type of propaganda the panel carries out (on behalf of the Spirituals or the Conventuals, of Thomas of Celano's *Vita Prima*, or Bonaventure's *Legenda Maior*), it enforces a particular mode of viewing. In the process, the viewer encounters a commentary on imitation and vision, and the limits and possibilities of the literal and figurative modes of the performance of those acts.

### The Body and the Document: The Pistoia Panel

The *vita* panel of Francis located in the Museo Civico in Pistoia, dated to the 1250s, depicts eight scenes, four each flanking the saint (Plate XV). The ratification of the Franciscan Rule by the pope and the



stigmatization form a pair of triangular wedges at the top, while the rest of the scenes are stacked in neat rectangles below on either side. The Pistoia panel, like the one by Berlinghieri, is succinct (even if it includes two extra episodes). Some scholars posit that the artist was familiar with the Bardi panel because of the similarities between the preaching scene and the episode of Francis's funeral on both images.<sup>84</sup> However, the compactness of the Pistoia image allows for a stronger resonance of the themes linking the narrative scenes. It has been suggested that the panel was clumsily repainted in the seventeenth century and that consequently some of the scenes, especially the one of Francis preaching, are a later addition and possibly a distortion of the miracle of the crib at Greccio.<sup>85</sup> But preaching was an activity fundamental to the mendicant orders and therefore should not be considered an anomaly when depicted. As we shall see, the motif of preaching acquires a special significance on this panel and intersects in complex ways with the presentation of Francis's preaching body.

The two scenes at the top betray unmistakable formal and thematic similarities. At the left Francis kneels in front of the pope, who hands him a charter approving the existence and customs of the Franciscan Order. The charter takes the form of a book as it passes from the pope's hands to those of Francis. The episode on the right grid shows Francis kneeling to the vision of a seraph in the rocky landscape of La Verna. No such obvious elements as a book, or the customary rays of gold, link the actors; instead, it is Francis's gesture – his outstretched arms – that signals the exchange taking place between them. Apart from the obvious statement of official and unofficial – albeit, divine – approval evinced by the two scenes, they also reflect a powerful and constant metaphor of Franciscan writing explored earlier: the equation of the *alter Christus's* body with that of a document.

The panels examined so far visualize this metaphor by means of a book held by Francis, the covers of which are usually ornamented with a cross, or a cross-shaped pattern, thus assimilating the motif of the stigmata into the motif of the decorative arts. The Pistoia panel performs a variation on this theme. It presents both book and saint as manufactured entities at the center of the panel, the former overlaying the latter, it reverses the premises of the public charter and the private (indeed, and secret) document, intended for select viewing. The book

containing the Rule is closed, but its contents were proclaimed and visualized by the conduct of the friars whose Order it ratified. The stigmatization, on the other hand, depicts the wounds on Francis's hands and feet, if not the notorious side wound, thus displaying the "secrets" stamped on his body.

Despite Francis's posture of acceptance in both scenes, there is an important difference between them. In the approval of the Rule, he receives the document that henceforth serves as the contract abjuring the friars to the mode of life envisaged by him. In the stigmatization, Francis both receives the stigmata *and* becomes the document. Bonaventure makes the connection explicit in the *Legenda Maior* when he compares Francis's body to a document sealed by Christ *just* as the pope endorses documents with his seal. More pertinently, Bonaventure asserts that the reason why Christ imprinted his seal on Francis was because "he recognized [Francis's] teaching as his own."<sup>86</sup> The Rule was designed as an official guide for the friars; similarly, Francis's body was marked as the most perfect guide for Christians aspiring to holiness. But the *alter Christus's* body did not, in fact, serve as such a guide because its owner preserved it as a secret document. Its "writing" was visible only inadvertently and intermittently by the few who strove to see it during the saint's lifetime.

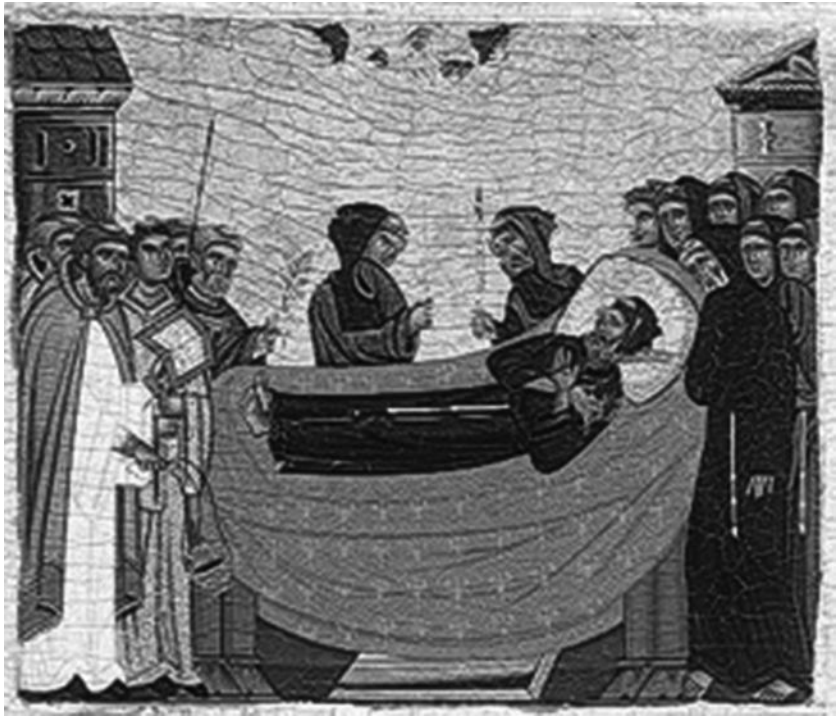
The scenes directly below this pair extend the motif of the document and its transmission to a broader public outside the confines of the papal palace and La Verna. The second scene on the left grid is a rare depiction of Francis preaching in church (Fig. 33). Flanked by two friars, he stands in a pulpit raised above an altar, his right hand emulating the gesture at the center of the panel. The full-length figure is inserted into a narrative context and compressed into a bust. The congregation stands on either end, listening to the saint's teachings. The pulpit has birds carved on it, each facing the other. Chiara Frugoni suggests that the motif of the birds links the preaching scene with that of Francis's sermon to the birds (which is not depicted on the Pistoia panel).<sup>87</sup> While this may certainly be one of its allusions, the depiction of the pulpit forges several other connections as well.

During the course of the duecento, the pulpit elicited a high order of artistic creativity.<sup>88</sup> The space from where the Word of God was spread abroad, the pulpit was a potent site of the preacher's presence. The altar



33. St. Francis preaching in church (detail), St. Francis and scenes from his life and afterlife, 1250s, Museo Civico, Pistoia, Italy. Courtesy of the Museo Civico, Pistoia, Italy.

was the pulpit's natural counterpart, where the words of the Gospel were literally transformed into the Word in the Eucharist. The depiction of Francis as a preacher and the prominence of the pulpit on the Pistoia panel, allude to the vocal presence of the saint, framing his voice as a medium for communicating the sacred. That vocal charisma is presented along with Francis's body, which is also a divine document. But the preacher's body was no simple somatic construct. In the thirteenth century (and partly in response to the rise of the mendicant orders), the very definition and justification of preaching and of the person who engaged in that activity were hotly debated. Claire M. Waters has shown how the preacher's personhood in this period was perceived as the site of intersection of Christ's speech and his own. By extension, then, "institutional sanction and descent from Christ made it possible for the male preacher's body to disappear, in a sense, into that which it represented. . . . The preacher re-presents God or Christ precisely because neither is bodily present."<sup>89</sup>



34. St. Francis's funeral (detail), St. Francis and scenes from his life and afterlife, 1250s, Museo Civico, Pistoia, Italy. Courtesy of the Museo Civico, Pistoia, Italy.

And yet, as Waters herself points out, the preacher's body was insistently present to its audience; there was no escaping its palpable physicality, even though it purported to represent other, higher powers. It is telling that Francis's preaching body is the only one in the Pistoia panel that directly addresses the audience both within and outside the scene in which it occurs. The fictive and the real audience are made privy only to the stigmata on his hands, while his feet and side remain concealed. The adjacent scene, however, shows Francis's full-length body at his funeral with the stigmata now visible on his feet and his hands crossed over his chest (Fig. 34). Thus, the two scenes each present partial views of Francis's wounds and contrasting versions of holy presence in which a living, preaching body is juxtaposed with a dead, silent corpse (which is simultaneously a relic). When read together, those bodies mark a spectrum of states that Francis assumes. The stigmata are accordingly divided between the two depictions/bodies and are revealed in their entirety when the scenes are perused in succession.

The rest of the scenes depict posthumous miracles, in three of which we observe the appearance of an altar table with, among other things, a book placed on it. Indeed, the scene depicting the cure of the girl with the twisted neck shows two books. The altar table is the locus of the miracles and a sign of the charisma invested in Francis's body that, even in its invisible state, allows the healings to take place. The book in each case stands as a figure of that body, which was supposedly buried beneath the altar. The resonance of the altar table and the book as potential sites of Francis's presence, and metaphors for it, are taken to an extreme by a panel located in Assisi explored in the next section.

### The Layered Body and the Hidden Body: The Assisi Panel

The dossal located in the Treasury of S. Francesco at Assisi is a much pared down version of the *vita* images we have examined (Plate XVI). Of rectangular shape, it presents only two scenes each flanking Francis on either side. All of these are miracles depicted on the Berlinghieri, Bardi, and Pistoia panels, but the selection of the specific episodes and their juxtaposition departs from the Tuscan images. Tiny dots mark Francis's hands and feet in his image at the center of the panel. He clutches a bright red cross in his right hand and a book in his left. If the cross hints at the side wound concealed beneath the dark habit, then the book augments the impression of the figure's depth. Unlike its depiction in the other images explored previously, the book is not closed and studded with ornamental motifs. It is open and contains an inscription drawn from Matthew 19:21, which reads, *Si vis perfectus esse vade vende omnes quae habes et da pauperibus*, or "If you will be perfect, go and sell all you have and give to the poor."

In displaying an open book with a message of complete renunciation, the image points to its own potential for openness – its variegated layers, which can be taken apart so as to reveal the body beneath the garb. The Gospel book furnishes the textual model for the imitation of Christ; Francis's body is the visual, but not entirely *visible*, counterpart to that model. The flanking scenes undergird this by omitting to depict Francis's body at all, except in one episode at the bottom left. However, the saint is not eliminated altogether; he appears in the form of relics in the other three scenes. Each one displays the gradual embellishment of

the relic shrine as it is transformed from a modest wooden structure to an altar table replete with liturgical vessels. In following this movement from starkness to ornamentation, the panel comments on the theme of the blank, open surface and the layers and marks it assumes over time and which alter its very identity. This movement encapsulates a pictorial metaphor on Francis's stigmatized body, the perfection of which demanded that it be covered in both literal and figurative modes.

The scene at top left depicts the first posthumous miracle performed by Francis, the cure of the girl with the twisted neck. In contrast to the towering buildings of the depicted cityscape, the shrine where the miracle occurs is humble. No more than a wooden box, it denotes the temporary tomb in which Francis's body was laid to rest soon after his death. The scene at the top right "clothes" this modest structure, transforming it into an altar. Scholars have commented on the fact that the table in this vignette resembles almost exactly the high altar table in the Lower Church of the Basilica of S. Francesco at Assisi, right down to the detail of the arches with the lamps hanging between them.<sup>90</sup> This piece of "topographical realism"<sup>91</sup> is significant and seems to be an intermittent strategy deployed on the *vita* panels of Francis. Just like the depiction of the birds in the Berlinghieri panel, the depiction of the altar table exactly as it exists in the Lower Church is telling for the ways in which it throws up the contrast to the depiction of Francis; the fundamental characteristics of this saint – his stigmata – do *not*, indeed *cannot*, adhere to what they actually looked like. The altar table holds a variety of Eucharistic vessels, each depicted in thin gold outlines. The performance of the sacrifice of Christ that they enable is effectively a reenactment of his suffering. By this logic, Francis, buried beneath the altar, literally bears aloft the suffering of the Savior whom he imitated so well. Even if the *alter Christus* is not depicted, his status as such is nicely – and literally – signaled by means of the altar.

The scene right below depicts the miracle of the cripple who was cured at the shrine. Again, the altar table is shown, this time draped by a cloth that conceals its contours. The emphasis on progressive concealment accords perfectly with the "secrecy that shrouds" our understanding of Francis's tomb,<sup>92</sup> a phenomenon that was keenly felt by some medieval pilgrims as well, and which the *vita* panels obliquely allude to even as they purport to advertise the shrine. Donal Cooper's study of the sources

reveals that the translation of Francis's body to the Basilica – and his shrine – was a deeply troubled matter. Thomas of Eccleston in the 1250s was the first of a number of friars to allege that the holy cadaver had been translated before the official ceremony and that it had been hidden in a secret tomb. According to Cooper, “the theme of the secret tomb became firmly embedded in the [Franciscan] Order's collective memory.”<sup>93</sup> Attesting to the longevity of this memory is the observation of the fifteenth-century Spanish pilgrim, Pero Tafur, whose writings indicate his perception that the true location of Francis's tomb was a secret entrusted to only the pope, one of his cardinals, and a single friar.<sup>94</sup>

If this were indeed the case (and Cooper makes a persuasive argument for it), then the Assisi panel brings to a head the fraught relations between itself as an altarpiece or altar dossal, the representations it bears, and the relic near or on which it claims to reside. Even as it seemingly indicates the site of Francis's tomb, it gently deflects viewer attention away from that site by clothing it and covering it with liturgical furnishings. This move serves to conceal the contents of the site even as it embellishes it. The altar table is thus configured and presented as an alternate, metaphorical version of Francis's body. In the process, the panel draws attention to the dialectic between the body displayed and the body displaced by its protective container or architectural infrastructure; between the body marked by divine intervention and the container manufactured by mortals, which was secreted away from curious eyes. In doing all this, the Assisi dossal performs a commentary on the layered nature of the *alter Christus's* body and the ways in which images imitate, or negate, the depiction of those layers.

### A Strategic Illusionism

The Franciscan Order is hailed as one of the most powerful agents of innovation in the medieval pictorial tradition; one that shook medieval art out of its stately hieraticism and invested it with a dynamic immediacy. The suggestively illusionistic spaces we find in the church of S. Francesco at Assisi or on the walls of the Bardi Chapel in S. Croce at Florence are testimony to this observation. Although the biographical panels depicting Francis are much earlier in date and considerably smaller than the wall frescoes, these too have been regarded in a similar

vein. According to Jeryldene M. Wood, they are “tangible expressions of the spiritual [leaving] as vivid an imprint on the imagination as relics, sacred places, shrines and other souvenirs of the holy.”<sup>95</sup>

The vividness of the *vita* panels, however, cannot be collapsed into the same category as the relics and souvenirs of Francis that sustain the saint’s touch. Nor can their ostensible clarity be taken for granted as signifiers of a world that mirrors the viewer’s own, urging him or her on to a more empathetic and immediate participation. Rather, the panels display a mode of discontinuous revelation similar to the rhetorical tactics evident in the Franciscan hagiographies and liturgical texts discussed in the previous chapter. Both the images and the texts in question urge a nuanced, even truncated, form of viewer interaction that triggers questions regarding the efficacy of vision, witness, and imitation. In this regard, the panels appear as worthy precursors to Giotto di Bondone’s practice of depicting rhythmic alternations of volumes and volumetric voids that elucidate a related set of issues to the sensitive viewer.<sup>96</sup>

Although they do not express Giotto’s technical preoccupations or virtuosity, the Franciscan *vita* panels are remarkable for deploying illusionism *not* as a literal mode of engagement but as a rhetorical tool that manipulates the viewer into conflicting positions by drawing him or her in with one hand and keeping him or her at a distance with the other. Indeed, each of the panels explored, with their imitation of pulpits or altar spaces derived from actual monuments and objects (or otherwise), evinces the Order’s awareness and propagation of the possibilities of an illusionistic idiom – that is, its potential to structure experience in distinct, even mutually exclusive, ways within the same visual field rather than its efficacy as a site of immediate and immersive engagement. Consequently, on looking upon the *vita* panels, the viewer apprehends Francis’s body, and his stigmata, as secrets. The viewer sees a representation – an image of the saint expressly positioned in accordance with the visual and tactile access that Francis permitted his friars, followers, and detractors, at different moments in time during his remarkable life.



## EPILOGUE: FRANCIS IN CONSTANTINOPLE

### A Detour in Constantinople

The Archaeological Museum of Istanbul houses, among other things, “an accident of history.”<sup>1</sup> Fragments of a fresco are scattered over a wall, each piece numbered and explained by a museum label positioned below the display. One piece stands out from the others. Relatively well preserved, it shows a friar dressed in long, gray robes and a knotted string tied around his waist. His head juts out from hunched shoulders and his arms are thrust forward, palms outstretched. The gesture does not accord with a prayerful attitude. Rather, it seems to be the expression of amazement, a double take.

The most authoritative reconstruction of the fresco situates the friar within a miracle, “gesturing in awe,”<sup>2</sup> “as if witnessing an event in wonderment.”<sup>3</sup> His astonishment may well be projected back upon the art historian examining these fragments, for they constitute part of the earliest, most extensive known fresco cycle of the life of St. Francis of Assisi in Constantinople, “hundreds of miles from Francis’s homeland.”<sup>4</sup> Although scholars have learned to temper their amazement at the existence of Franciscan artifacts in the East, this particular fresco still offers food for thought. Discovered at the site of the Kalenderhane Camii in Istanbul, it is believed to date to the period of Latin rule (1204–61) in Constantinople.<sup>5</sup> Reconstructions show that its program consisted of the figure of St. Francis in the center and scenes from his life unfolding laterally on either side. The resemblance of the fresco to the format of the *vita* icon raises questions central to this study. By the first half of the

thirteenth century, the Crusade was transformed into a most sophisticated institution.<sup>6</sup> The mendicant orders, however, were not primarily part of it.<sup>7</sup> Only as late as 1217 did the Franciscan general chapter send delegations to several sites, including the Holy Land. Franciscan houses were gradually established in Constantinople, Antioch, Jerusalem, Crete, parts of the Greek mainland, Cyprus, Georgia, and Armenia. Operating from within such an extensive network, the Franciscans played an important role in negotiations for the Union of the Catholic and Orthodox Churches.<sup>8</sup> But in the realm of material culture, the specific Franciscan contributions to Constantinople and the Byzantine Empire as a whole are elusive.

Scholars believe that the use of images by the mendicant friars in their travels abroad was informed by an agenda of conversion. But records of visual and material exchanges between the Orders and the Orthodox populations of the Byzantine Empire are highly equivocal.<sup>9</sup> In this respect, the site of the Kalenderhane Camii in Istanbul is unique in furnishing the history of a particular monument and its modifications over centuries, an important part of which also covers the period of Latin rule in Constantinople. Not only is the Kalenderhane one of the rare sites in Constantinople to yield a full-fledged mendicant pictorial program; its continuous use after the Byzantine reconquest in 1261 reveals the possible modes in which the Latin presence was received during the reign of the Palaeologoi and the ways in which the *vita* format, specifically, was implicated in the negotiations between the two cultures.

### The Kalenderhane Site: Franciscan or Dominican?

The history of the excavation of the Kalenderhane Camii in Istanbul begins in the summer of 1965 when the key to the disused mosque was retrieved from “the house to the left of the main door” by archaeologists in order to gain access to the interior.<sup>10</sup> In the years to follow, the historical layers embedded in the site were gradually uncovered. Beginning as a late Roman bath in the fifth century, it accommodated a church in the sixth century with additions made to it over the centuries that followed.<sup>11</sup> Cecil L. Striker proposes that after Iconoclasm the church at this site came to be known as the Church of Ta Kyrou, which, in the Comnenian period before Latin rule, was the Kyriotissa

Monastery.<sup>12</sup> The discovery of the fresco cycle of Francis in this complex suggests that the Latins held the monastery in the Crusader period.<sup>13</sup> The elusive nature of the Franciscan (indeed, the overall mendicant) presence in Constantinople is underscored by two resounding facts: one, that we have no evidence of the existence of a Franciscan monastery in the city and, two, that the exact number of churches and monasteries held by the Latins is uncertain.<sup>14</sup> Consequently, Striker and Kuban are cautious about assuming that the frescoed life of Francis automatically suggests a Franciscan establishment at that site. They point us instead to the existence of an anonymous French Dominican monastery mentioned in Constantinople in 1233 and the French stylistic features observed in the Kalenderhane frescoes.<sup>15</sup> Striker and Kuban are correct in their hesitations regarding the transformation of the Kyriotissa monastery to a Franciscan house. Nonetheless, enough evidence exists to argue *against* a Dominican establishment at the site, even if Franciscan possession of it is more difficult to prove. Joanna Cannon's study of the Dominican patronage of art in Provincia Romana highlights its difference from Franciscan interests. The latter's legislations regarding visual programs were comparatively relaxed, indicating an Order less able – or more likely – less willing, to control display and patronage than its Dominican counterparts.<sup>16</sup> Where images of Francis began to circulate almost immediately after his death, the Dominican Order actively discouraged such attitudes toward its founder. Compounding these proscriptions is the actual dearth of imagery for the Dominican Order in the first half of the thirteenth century. No clusters of votive frescoes on Dominican church walls exist to attest to strong local cults, nor was panel painting given much importance.<sup>17</sup>

More specifically, Cannon argues that the *vita* format was never used for representations of Dominic as it was for Francis. It was suggested that the full-length portrait panel of Dominic presently housed in the Fogg Museum of Art in Cambridge, Massachusetts, was originally a *vita* panel, with lost edges.<sup>18</sup> Some scholars believed that it was nearly contemporaneous with the 1235 Berlinghieri panel of Francis explored in the previous chapter.<sup>19</sup> However, Cannon and others have argued against such a hypothesis, going so far as to claim that even the *vita* panels of Dominic that *do* survive from the end of the thirteenth century and beyond had the episodes from the saint's life added much later.<sup>20</sup> The debate offers

valid points on both sides; however, in light of the fact that single portrait images of Dominic are nonexistent from the first half of the duecento (apart from the lone Fogg example),<sup>21</sup> it is hard to imagine that images of the saint proliferated in the *vita* format. Hence, I would suggest that the foundation containing the Franciscan frescoes in Constantinople was in all probability *not* a Dominican establishment. Apart from the recorded paucity of their use of images in the early duecento, the Dominican Order hardly ever engaged in elaborate fresco cycle decorations for its churches.<sup>22</sup> In contrast, the Franciscans not only generated images extensively, but by the midcentury they had also undertaken fresco programs depicting the life of their founder, such as those in the Lower Church of the Basilica of S. Francesco at Assisi. What distinguishes the Kalenderhane frescoes from the latter is their arrangement in the *vita* format.

### The Franciscan Frescoes: A Crusader Product?

Striker and Kuban unearthed the frescoes depicting the life of St. Francis in the south chapel of the Kalenderhane structure, or what would have been the *diakonicon* for the original Byzantine church.<sup>23</sup> The Latin occupiers did not change this space in any significant way but merely reused it for their own purposes.<sup>24</sup> The chapel covers a small area and is lit by three windows in the polygonal apse. It is preceded by a square bay lit by eight windows. In spite of the fragmentary nature of the frescoes, Striker and Kuban offer a convincing reconstruction of the visual program of the chapel.

The center of the semidome defining the apse of the chapel depicted a standing figure of Francis, three times larger in scale than the figures in the flanking scenes. Francis was shown holding an open book in his left hand, with the Theotokos and Christ in the vault directly above him and angel busts on either side of the mother and child. Below, to right and left were five scenes each from Francis's life, arranged in three registers with one scene on top, three in the middle, and one below on each side. On the face of the arch defining the semidome was inscribed a line from Psalm 26:8, which read, "I love the habitation of thy house and the place where thy glory dwells." The arches on each side depicted the standing figures of two Greek fathers, one of whom was securely identified as John Chrysostom on the basis of pieces of a large inscription.<sup>25</sup>

The scenes flanking Francis are fragmentary in the extreme. Three of them are almost nonexistent, but the rest contain enough traces to enable some conjecture on their subject matter. Numerous fragments with inscriptions were recovered, which suggests that each scene was labeled. Enough evidence also remains to indicate the separation of each scene by distinct red lines. Among the identifiable episodes, at least three show Francis performing miracles, a possible exorcism, the preaching to the birds, and the death of the saint. Yet another scene – the fragment depicting the pair of surprised friars that opened this chapter – has been identified as the appearance of Francis to the brothers at Arles.<sup>26</sup> The Kalenderhane fresco was probably executed before the Byzantine reconquest of Constantinople in 1261, thus placing this cycle among the earliest depictions of Francis's life on fresco. It is also the earliest preserved cycle, dating to at least a decade before the dates ascribed to the fragmentary cycle in the Lower Church of Assisi.

### Francis's Image: Legitimization or Conversion?

The fact of a recently deceased, papally sponsored Catholic saint attaining visual expression in a monastery in Constantinople might be read as an attempt to impose the Catholic presence on the capital of the Orthodox empire and to effect conversion of the Orthodox peoples – a mission that the mendicant orders were charged with. However, the *vita* format of the Kalenderhane fresco has modified such an obvious interpretation, leading scholars to yoke it instead to a project of legitimization.

Ann Derbes and Amy Neff suggest that because the *vita* format in the Italian peninsula derived from its Byzantine counterpart, the Franciscan friars “effectively inscribed Francis into a veritable lineage of holy men, equating him with the saints of late antiquity and Byzantium.”<sup>27</sup>

Further evidence of venerable references abounds in the fresco, specifically with regard to the figures of the Greek church fathers depicted on the soffit of the entrance arch on either side.<sup>28</sup> Derbes and Neff suggest that the portrait of Francis was manipulated to resemble that of John Chrysostom – one of the fathers on the arch soffit – and that the resemblance is even detected in the *vita* panel of Francis in the Assisi Treasury, indicating that “the intent in this and other panels was less to

represent the saint's actual appearance than to associate him with an Eastern holy man."<sup>29</sup>

The relationship between the portrait of Francis and the narrative of his life on the Kalenderhane fresco conforms to that of the Franciscan panels examined in the previous chapter. The scenes from the saint's life are presented as equally important components of the overall image as the central portrait. Indeed, the fresco devotes more space to the depiction of the narrative than to Francis's depiction at its center. The most striking feature of the narrative scenes is their insistence on miracles, including the preaching to the birds and the appearance of Francis to the brothers at Arles. Even though three scenes are completely destroyed, it still obtains that the major part of the program was a compendium of miracles, just like the panel paintings of Francis produced in Tuscany, Umbria, and Rome. In addition to this, the fact that every single fragment recovered depicts groups of Franciscan friars immediately identifiable by their robes attests to a literal Franciscan presence that the fresco affirms. However, a major difference between the fresco and its Franciscan counterparts on panels lies in the spatial experiences that wall decorations and panel paintings allow. The Franciscan panels are shaped as altarpieces or retables and denote the specific site of the altar itself, even if they were not permanently placed on it or in its vicinity.

In a similar move, the Kalenderhane fresco is an integral part of the chapel and the altar space in which it exists, positioned as it is on the wall right behind and above the altar. It functions as a mural-altarpiece. The fresco is framed by the arches leading into the chapel depicting the fathers of the Greek Orthodox Church and by the depiction of the Byzantine Theotokos and Child on the vault right above it. The physical and material frame is Byzantine. Its significance lies in the contrast to the image it encloses, which is insistently Franciscan in subject matter and iconography. This point is further intensified by the inscription on the arch that forms the entrance to the chapel. Drawn from Psalm 26:8, it says, "I love the habitation of thy house and the place where thy glory dwells."<sup>30</sup> This citation differs in its affective tone from the didactic messages transmitted by those Franciscan panels bearing inscriptions examined in the previous chapter. The terms "I" and "thou" may be echoed by a venerator praying in front of the chapel to God. But they may equally pertain to the contents of the chapel itself. The psalmic "I" is a

flexible pronoun, standing for a position that can be entered into by a reader or venerator,<sup>31</sup> but also by the people depicted in the images near which it occurs. Simultaneously, the “I” could, conceivably, refer to the entire image itself. It can plausibly be applied to the fresco that inhabits the “house,” “the place where [God’s] glory dwells” (the chapel).

Importantly, the fresco inhabits that space in a mode unlike that of a panel painting because it cannot be moved. In these ways, the Kalenderhane fresco invokes the Franciscan properties of the *vita* format that the Order had already molded to its own concerns. This does not exclude the matter of legitimization via references to Byzantium, but that is only one side of the story. The boundaries defining the extent of the Catholic and/or Orthodox nature of the visual matrix at stake are anamorphic because of its ambiguities of site, prototype, and intention. The fresco would have been immediately identifiable to a Byzantine Orthodox audience since the *vita* imagery was already in circulation in various regions of the empire. But the specifically *Franciscan* identity, spelled out through the literal signifiers of dress, site, and objecthood, also bears the seeds of a potential and implicit resistance to the dominant culture from which the Franciscans had already borrowed extensively. The potential of the fresco as a space of self-affirmation in definite *contrast* to its supposed Byzantine prototype is strong.<sup>32</sup> To a Catholic or a Franciscan audience, the fresco would resonate with the imagery developed by the Order in Italy, where it canceled out Byzantine features through the inclusion of a range of posthumous miracles and the depiction of an altar space. While this (non)-reference to Byzantium may not have mattered in the Italian peninsula, its application in Constantinople assumes the potential of visual polemic, Francis’s resemblance to the Greek church fathers notwithstanding.

In sum, the Kalenderhane fresco may be regarded as a case study of how physical and political subjugation is not always congruent with prevailing perceptions of cultural influence. The culture under siege may well exercise a powerful hold against which the colonizers strive to assert themselves. More importantly, the fresco reveals the importance of the *vita* format not just as a hermeneutic tool negotiating the critical nodes of intellectual and philosophical concepts regarding representation but also as an agent of exchange between two hostile political and religious groups.

### An Act of Iconoclasm?

Byzantium did not remain captive for long. In 1261 Constantinople was resettled and rebuilt, effacing the traces of Latin occupation and damage.<sup>33</sup> Changes were also made to the Kalenderhane church. Archaeological reports indicate that in the Palaeologan period the apse of the Franciscan chapel was blocked off by a wall.<sup>34</sup> The three windows were covered, and a quadrant vault was inserted into the chapel space. The entire area was then frescoed with icons of numerous Byzantine male and female saints and scenes of the *Koimesis* and the *Melismos*. One wonders why the Franciscan narrative program was not replaced by the portrait and narrative of a Byzantine saint. A possible reason could be that the *vita* format was never intended for the medium of monumental fresco painting in Byzantium in the first place. The alternative the Byzantines came up with, however, was no less powerful. The imagery chosen to efface the mendicant program enforces a subtle, but more completely *Byzantine* mode of viewing that relies not on literal correspondences, but on rhetorical associations. Thus, the flesh of the Christ Child offered for sacrifice on a paten in the scene of the *Melismos* resonates with the body of the dead Theotokos laid out on her bier in the scene of the *Koimesis*, even though the archaeological reconstruction suggests that these scenes were positioned at a distance from each other.<sup>35</sup>

However, the practice of *synkrisis* linking these superficially disparate episodes urges the viewer to enter into a specifically Byzantine sensibility that pivots on formal and thematic associations between images – an effective way of erasing the literal presence of Francis from the same space. Archaeological reports claim that the fresco of Francis was blocked in order to provide a continuous wall for the Palaeologan program. But is it also possible that the resonance of the curved archway into the Franciscan chapel was not lost on the Byzantines – that in erecting a wall (or, more accurately, a barrier), they were consciously blocking entrance into this space (“the habitation of God”), just as they were veiling the mural altarpiece that occupied its very heart? In one stroke, the wall dealt a blow to the image of Francis and the movement of piety toward it by a Catholic venerator. But a barrier has two sides. By erecting the wall, the Palaeologan workers also, ironically, pushed the Franciscan



fresco within a more acutely Byzantine sacred infrastructure, one concealed by a screen (the wall frescoed with Byzantine imagery) and dominating the intimate space of a former chapel. In other words, the fresco found itself in the same position as that of the Byzantine *vita* panels, some of which might also have been located within a chapel behind the sanctuary screen in a Byzantine church. An act of iconoclasm, thus, also has two sides. In this case, it (perhaps) rebounded on the unwitting perpetrators by transforming intended difference into a startling version of similarity.

### The End

In bringing issues of religious and political identity to the forefront, the case of the Kalenderhane fresco crystallizes and underscores the theme dominating this entire book: the expression of a complex, changeable identity by means of images, and the capacity of images to capture and communicate those identities efficaciously. The supposed lack of specificity in the Byzantine *vita* icons has puzzled scholars because the images were expected to display blatant (or at least tenuous) regional, ethnic, or sociopolitical affiliations. Instead, the format undertook an even more challenging task. It aimed to remind viewers of the tremendous ontological possibilities intrinsic to the very definition of a saint. These possibilities were expressed in words and images even before the emergence of the *vita* format. In Byzantium, the practices of reading and looking at saints' lives entailed an appreciation of the distinct – sometimes overlapping – forms their protagonists could sustain over a lifetime and beyond. Illustrated manuscripts, icons, and hagiographic narratives urged viewers and readers to gauge the spectrum of identities that a saint could assume and, by extension, the range of conceptions governing the pictorial depiction of a saint, mediated by such terms as *morphe*, *emphereia*, and *eikon*. In engaging with the changing nature of the holy one, these texts and images were also implicated in reflections about the nature of textual and pictorial representation. These included issues such as the relative efficacy of words versus images, relics versus icons, and sight versus hearing in capturing holy presence.

By the same token, the *vita* format was deployed in honor of Francis of Assisi in order to navigate the challenges that his body and practices posed for sanctity in the Latin West. No other person in the history of sainthood had posed such challenges, simply because nobody had performed (or was believed to have performed) so startlingly brilliant an act of *imitatio Christi*. In having thus radically transformed the concept of imitation, Francis's physical self was enmeshed in a mire of problems regarding its pictorial and textual depiction. These problems are evident in the rhetoric of paradox that Franciscan hagiographers continually used to describe the stigmatization and its consequences. While paradox and secrecy were deployed as tropes in most hagiographies, in Francis's case they acquired an acute resonance which transformed them from mere generalities to carefully thought out strategies, designed to proffer differing degrees of access to a reader or viewer. This last point is critical; the only way in which representations of Francis could communicate the radical nature of the saint was by offering selective visual access and by instilling in their audience consciousness of that fact. The juxtaposition of a portrait with narrative scenes positioned the audience in varying relationships with the *alter Christus*. These relationships sometimes enabled proximity and inclusion, but just as often occluded and obstructed the viewer. The *vita* format was enlisted in all the above ambitions, and carried them out to perfection.

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Saints have a habit of appearing (and disappearing) throughout human history, at moments of crisis or otherwise. *The Plague* by Albert Camus is one of the greatest formulations of a trenchantly modern crisis filtered through what is regarded as the "classic" medieval scenario: a town overrun with the black death. In the midst of chaos, one of the principal characters, Tarrou, expresses his interest in learning how to become a saint. "But you don't believe in God," exclaims his interlocutor. "Exactly!" responds Tarrou. "Can one be a saint without God?"

If Tarrou's ambition – and question – seem alien to the preoccupations of our age, extravagant, and explicable only within the medieval context of the plague, they were no less compelling and difficult in the medieval period itself. We tend to view this era as one proliferating with

holy men and women and their representations. This was, in fact, precisely the problem for the medievals as well: that the abundance of such representations (in the form of texts, images, men, and women) would be mistaken for ease, and that they would furnish blueprints or models for anyone who wished to read, write, paint, sculpt, and think about a saint, or even become one. This book has argued that such was not the case; that the saint and his or her life were instruments of critique designed to overturn any singular notion of sanctity, representation, and reception. The saint's complex ontology provoked a reevaluation of the norms that drove the making and viewing of hagiographic texts and images, of the relative powers of images and relics, of the shifting values assigned to the senses, and of the nature of holy presence and its relationship to artists, writers, words, icons, and sacred remains. In the process, the figure of the saint was framed as a robust but highly malleable tool with which to rethink the very principles undergirding the visual discourse between the eleventh and the thirteenth centuries in Byzantium and the Latin West.



## NOTES

### Introduction: The Metaphor of the “Living Icon”

1. Aviad M. Kleinberg, *Prophets in Their Own Country: Living Saints and the Making of Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 5.
2. Basil the Great, *Patrologia cursus completus. Series graeca*, ed. J. P. Migne (Paris: Garnier, 1912), 32: 229A. Hereafter cited as *PG*.
3. See James A. Francis, “Living Icons: Tracing a Motif in Verbal and Visual Representation from the Second to Fourth Centuries, C.E.,” *American Journal of Philology* 124:4 (Winter 2003): 575–600. For an exploration of the metaphor of the “living icon” through the Byzantine era in various genres, see Stratis Papaioannou, “Animate Statues: Aesthetics and Movement,” in David Jenkins and Charles Barber, eds., *Reading Michael Psellos* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 117–30.
4. See Gregory of Nazianzos, *PG* 36: 569 A. A discussion of similar issues may be found in Peter R. L. Brown, “A Dark-Age Crisis: Aspects of the Iconoclastic Controversy,” *English Historical Review* 88 (1973): 1–34.
5. For a discussion of the manuscript and its images, see Kurt Weitzmann, *The Miniatures of the Sacra Parallela, Parisinus Graecus 923* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979); and Leslie Brubaker, *Vision and Meaning in Ninth-Century Byzantium: Image as Exegesis in the Homilies of Gregory of Nazianzus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), especially 33–7, although mention of the manuscript is made repeatedly throughout the book.
6. Papaioannou, “Animate Statues: Aesthetics and Movement,” 117–30.
7. Sixten Ringbom, *Icon to Narrative: The Rise of the Dramatic Close-Up in Fifteenth-Century Devotional Painting* (Doorspijk, Netherlands: Davaco, 1984), 39.
8. Charles Barber, *Figure and Likeness: On the Limits of Representation in Byzantine Iconoclasm* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), and *Contesting the Logic of Painting: Art and Understanding in Eleventh-Century Byzantium* (Leiden: Brill, 2007).
9. Francis of Assisi is not the only saint to be referred to as the *alter Christus*; see Jeffrey Hamburger, “Brother, Bride, and Alter Christus: The Virginal Body of John the Evangelist in Medieval Art, Theology, and Literature,” in Ursula Peters, ed., *Text und Kultur: Mittelalterliche Literatur 1150–1450* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2001), 296–328. But for the purposes of this book, the term shall refer to Francis, and Francis alone, each time it is used.
10. See Rosalind B. Brooke, ed. and trans., *Scripta Leonis, Rufini, et Angeli sociorum S. Francisci: The Writings of Leo, Rufino, and Angelo, Companions of St. Francis* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 104.

11. See “The Morning Sermon on St. Francis, Preached at Paris, October 4, 1255,” by St. Bonaventure, in Regis J. Armstrong, J. Wayne Hellmann, and William J. Short, eds., *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, vol. 2, *The Founder* (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute of St. Bonaventure University, 2000), 513.
12. Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art*, trans. E. Jephcott (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 261–96.
13. For a comprehensive treatment of the subject, see Anne Derbes, *Picturing the Passion in Late Medieval Italy: Narrative Painting, Franciscan Ideologies, and the Levant* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
14. Bissera V. Pentcheva, *Icons and Power: The Mother of God in Byzantium* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), 150.
15. Papaioannou, “Animate Statues: Aesthetics and Movement,” 117–30.
16. Gilbert Dagron, “Holy Images and Likenesses,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 45 (1991): 23–33.
17. *Ibid.*, 33.
18. Patriarch Nikephoros, PG 100: 280A.
19. Henry G. Liddell and Robert Scott, *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon*, 7th ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003), 611.
20. *Ibid.*, 98.
21. See the discussion in Barber, *Contesting the Logic of Painting*, 131–57.
22. Cynthia Hahn, “Absent No Longer: The Sign and the Saint in Late Medieval Pictorial Hagiography,” in Gottfried Kerscher, ed., *Hagiographie und Kunst, der Heiligenkult in Schrift, Bild, und Architektur* (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer, 1993), 152.
23. *Ibid.*
24. Denis F. Sullivan, ed., *The Life of Saint Nikon: Text, Translation, and Commentary* (Brookline, MA: Hellenic College Press, 1987), 63.
25. Gregory of Nazianzos, *Funeral Oration on Basil of Caesarea* (Orat. 43.80), in *Grégoire de Nazianze. Discours 27–31*, ed. P. Gallay, Sources Chrétiennes (Paris, 1978).
26. Michael Psellos, *Michaelis Pselli Theologica* I, 1.19.49–69, ed. P. Gautier (Leipzig: Bibliotheca Teubneriana, 1989).
27. For studies on Byzantine ekphrasis, see Liz James and Ruth Webb, “‘To Understand Ultimate Things and Enter Secret Places’: Ekphrasis and Art in Byzantium,” *Art History* 14 (1991): 1–17; Robert S. Nelson, “To Say and To See: Ekphrasis and Vision in Byzantium,” in Nelson, ed., *Visuality Before and Beyond the Renaissance: Seeing as Others Saw* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 143–68; Leslie Brubaker, “Perception and Conception: Art, Theory, and Culture in Ninth-Century Byzantium,” *Word & Image* 5 (1989): 19–32; Ruth Webb, “Accomplishing the Picture: Ekphrasis, Mimesis, and Martyrdom in Asterios of Amaseia,” in Liz James, ed., *Art and Text in Byzantine Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 13–32; and Webb, *Ekphrasis, Imagination, and Persuasion in Ancient Rhetorical Theory and Practice* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009).
28. See the studies by Rebecca Corrie, “Coppo di Marcovaldo’s *Madonna del Bordone* and the Meaning of the Bare-Legged Christ Child in Siena and the East,” *Gesta* 35:1 (1996): 43–65, and “The Political Meaning of Coppo di Marcovaldo’s *Madonna and Child in Siena*,” *Gesta* 29:1 (1990): 61–75.
29. Jeffrey C. Anderson, “The Byzantine Panel Portrait before and after Iconoclasm,” in Robert Ousterhout and Leslie Brubaker, eds., *The Sacred Image East and West* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 35–6.

30. Michael Camille, *Image on the Edge: The Margins of Medieval Art* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992).
31. Jaś Elsner, “Between Mimesis and Divine Power: Visuality in the Greco-Roman World,” in Nelson, *Visuality Before and Beyond the Renaissance*, 45–69.
32. W.J.T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 42.
33. Georges Didi-Huberman, *Fra Angelico: Dissemblance and Figuration*, trans. Jane Marie Todd (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).
34. *Ibid.*, 19.
35. *Ibid.*, 20.
36. *Ibid.*, 21.
37. *Ibid.*, 22.
38. Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).
39. Jeffrey Hamburger, *Nuns as Artists: The Visual Culture of a Medieval Convent* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), and *The Rothschild Canticles: Art and Mysticism in Flanders and the Rhineland circa 1300* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).
40. Michelle Karnes, *Imagination, Meditation, and Cognition in the Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).
41. See Anna Kartsonis, *Anastasis: The Making of an Image* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986); and Hans Belting, *The Image and Its Public in the Middle Ages: Form and Function of Early Paintings of the Passion*, trans. Mark Bartusis and Raymond Meier (New Rochelle, NY: Aristide D. Caratzas, 1990). For a historical overview of the change from Christus triumphans to Christus patiens and the semiotic issues it unleashed, see Rachel Fulton, *From Judgement to Passion: Devotion to Christ and the Virgin Mary, 800–1200* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).
42. For a consideration of these issues in late antiquity, see Nicholas Constan, *Proclus of Constantinople and the Cult of the Virgin in Late Antiquity* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), especially the chapters, “‘The Ear of the Virginal Body’: The Poetics of Sound in the School of Proclus,” and “The Purple Thread and the Veil of Flesh: Symbols of Weaving in the Sermons of Proclus.” See also the chapter “Truth and Economy,” in Barber, *Figure and Likeness*; and the essays in Maria Vassilaki, ed., *Images of the Mother of God: Perceptions of the Theotokos in Byzantium* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005).
43. See the seminal study by Brian Stock, *The Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), 241.
44. The literature on Byzantine iconoclasm is vast. For the precepts of the Second Council of Nicaea in 787, see *Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio*, ed. J. D. Mansi, 53 vols. (Paris: H. Walter, 1901–27); and Daniel J. Sahas, ed., *Icon and Logos: Sources in Eighth-Century Iconoclasm; An Annotated Translation of the Sixth Session of the Seventh Ecumenical Council (Nicaea, 787)* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986). For discussions of iconoclasm in Byzantium, see G. Ladner, “The Concept of the Image in the Greek Fathers and the Byzantine Iconoclastic Controversy,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 7 (1953): 1–34; André Grabar, *L’Iconoclasme byzantin: Le dossier archéologique* (Paris: Flammarion, 1984); Peter R. L. Brown, “A Dark-Age Crisis: Aspects of the Iconoclastic Controversy,” *English Historical Review* 88 (1973): 1–34;

- Anthony Bryer and Judith Herrin, eds., *Iconoclasm: Papers Given at the Ninth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies* (Birmingham: Center for Byzantine Studies, 1977); Jaroslav Pelikan, *Imago Dei: The Byzantine Apologia for Icons* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011); Marie-France Auzépy, “La destruction de l’icône du Christ de la Chalcé par Léon III: propagande ou réalité?,” *Byzantion* 60 (1990): 445–92; Charles Barber, “From Transformation to Desire: Art and Worship after Byzantine Iconoclasm,” *Art Bulletin* 75 (1993): 7–16; Barber, “From Image into Art: Art after Byzantine Iconoclasm,” *Gesta* 34:1 (1995): 5–10; Kenneth Parry, *Depicting the Word: Byzantine Iconophile Thought of the Eighth and Ninth Centuries* (Leiden: Brill, 1996); Barber, *Figure and Likeness*; Thomas F. X. Noble, *Images, Iconoclasm and the Carolingians* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009); Leslie Brubaker and John Haldon, eds., *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era, c. 680–850: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); and Jaś Elsner, “Iconoclasm as Discourse: From Antiquity to Byzantium,” *Art Bulletin* 94:3 (2012): 368–94.
45. For a comprehensive study of such attitudes, see Barber, *Contesting the Logic of Painting*.
  46. *Ibid.*, 23–60.
  47. *Ibid.*, 61–98.
  48. See Belting, *Likeness and Presence*; Stock, *Implications of Literacy*; Herbert L. Kessler, *Spiritual Seeing. Picturing God’s Invisibility in Medieval Art* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000); Kessler, *Seeing Medieval Art* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004); and Brigitte Miriam Bedos-Rezak, *When Ego Was Imago: Signs of Identity in the Middle Ages* (Leiden: Brill, 2011).
  49. C. Stephen Jaeger, *The Envy of Angels: Cathedral Schools and Social Ideals in Medieval Europe, 950–1200* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), 8–9.
  50. Amy Hollywood observes that in hagiography all signs of devotion and sanctity have to be externalized and made visible to the saint’s public, so that what might have begun as internal experience is represented as outward bodily performance. See Hollywood, *The Soul as Virgin Wife: Mechthild of Magdeburg, Marguerite Porete and Meister Eckhart* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 1995), 27–39. My argument is that it is precisely this process of externalization that is problematized and pushed to the limits in Francis’s case.
  51. André Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, trans. J. Birrell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 33–58.
  52. See Otto Demus, *Byzantine Art and the West* (New York: New York University Press, 1970); Ernst Kitzinger, *The Art of Byzantium and the Medieval West: Selected Studies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976); James H. Stubblebine, “Byzantine Influence in Thirteenth-Century Italian Panel Painting,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 20 (1966): 85–101; Belting, *Likeness and Presence*; Valentino Pace, “Pittura bizantina nell’Italia meridionale (secolo XI–XIV),” in Guglielmo Cavallo, ed., *I Bizantini in Italia* (Milan: Libri Scheiwiller, 1982); Gerhard Wolf, *Salus Populi Romani: Die Geschichte römischer Kultbilder im Mittelalter* (Weinheim: VCH, Acta humaniora, 1990); Corrie, “The Political Meaning of Coppo di Marcovaldo’s Madonna and Child in Siena”; Derbes, *Picturing the Passion*; Robert S. Nelson, “The Italian Appreciation and Appropriation of Illuminated Byzantine Manuscripts, ca. 1200–1450,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 49 (1995): 209–35; Corrie, “Coppo di Marcovaldo’s Madonna del Bordone and the Meaning of the Bare-Legged Christ Child in Siena and the East”; Amy Neff, “Byzantium Westernized, Byzantium Marginalized: Two Icons in the Supplicationes Variae,” *Gesta* 38:1



- (1999): 81–103; Michele Bacci, *Il Pennello dell'Evangelista: Storia delle Immagini Sacre attribuite a San Luca* (Pisa: GISEM, 1998); Anthony Cutler, "Misapprehensions and Misgivings: Byzantine Art and the West in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries," in Cutler, *Byzantium, Italy and the North: Papers on Cultural Relations* (London: Pindar Press, 2000), 474–509; Anne Derbes and Amy Neff, "Italy, the Mendicant Orders, and the Byzantine Sphere," in Helen C. Evans, ed., *Byzantium: Faith and Power (1261–1557)* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2004), 449–61; Holger Klein, "Eastern Objects and Western Desires: Relics and Reliquaries between Byzantium and the West," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 58 (2004): 283–314; Annemarie Weyl Carr, *Cyprus and the Devotional Arts of Byzantium in the Era of the Crusades* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005); and Robert S. Nelson and Henry Maguire, eds., *San Marco, Byzantium, and the Myths of Venice* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 2010).
53. Henry Maguire, *Icons of Their Bodies: Saints and Their Representation in Byzantium* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000); and Cynthia Hahn, *Portrayed on the Heart: Narrative Effect in Pictorial Lives of Saints from the Tenth through the Thirteenth Centuries* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).
  54. Nancy P. Ševčenko, "The Vita Icon and the Painter as Hagiographer," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 53 (1999): 149–65.
  55. Barber, *Figure and Likeness*. See Bissera V. Pentcheva, *The Sensual Icon: Space, Ritual, and the Senses in Byzantium* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010).
  56. Derbes, *Picturing the Passion*.
  57. See Chiara Frugoni, *Francesco e l'invenzione delle stimmate. Una Storia per Parole e Immagini fino a Bonaventura e Giotto* (Turin: Einaudi, 1993); and the essay by G. W. Ahlquist and W. R. Cook, "The Representation of Posthumous Miracles of St. Francis of Assisi in Thirteenth-Century Italian Painting," in William R. Cook, ed., *The Art of the Franciscan Order in Italy* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 211–56.
  58. See Stubblebine, "Byzantine Influence in Thirteenth-Century Italian Panel Painting," 93; and Ernst H. Gombrich, "Bonaventura Berlinghieri's Palmettes," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 39 (1976): 234–6.
  59. The study that set the trend for such an interpretation of Franciscan art and literature is Henry Thode's *Franz von Assisi und die Anfänge der Kunst der Renaissance in Italien* (Berlin: Grote, 1885). This is discussed in more detail in [Chapter 4](#).
  60. Sarah McNamer, *Affective Meditation and the Invention of Medieval Compassion* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 86–115.
  61. Elsner, "Iconoclasm as Discourse: From Antiquity to Byzantium," 368–94.
  62. Elsner discusses the ontological and epistemological dimensions of the Byzantine icon in [ibid.](#), 376–7.
  63. Barber, *Contesting the Logic of Painting*, 23–60, 131–57.
  64. See [ibid.](#)
  65. Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 370–6.
  66. Derbes, *Picturing the Passion*.
  67. Deno J. Geanakoplos, "Bonaventura, the Two Mendicant Orders, and the Greeks at the Council of Lyons," *Studies in Church History* 13 (1976): 183–211.
  68. Amy Neff, "Byzantine Icons, Franciscan Prayer: Images of Intercession and Ascent in the Upper Church of San Francesco, Assisi," in Timothy J. Johnson, ed., *Franciscans at Prayer* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 358–9.
  69. Derbes, *Picturing the Passion*, 14–15.

70. Rebecca Corrie, for instance, argues that Sieneese images of the Virgin and Child, while drawing heavily from Byzantine motifs, succeeded in transforming those into a specifically regional symbolic language. See Corrie, “The Political Meaning of Coppo di Marcovaldo’s Madonna and Child in Siena,” and “Coppo di Marcovaldo’s Madonna del Bordone and the Meaning of the Bare-Legged Christ Child in Siena and the East.” See also the telling comments on the ways in which the rhetorical potential of the Byzantine Theotokos and Christ is transformed in later Sieneese images in C. Jean Campbell, *The Commonwealth of Nature: Art and Poetic Community in the Age of Dante* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2008), 71–2.
71. Hahn, *Portrayed on the Heart*, 36.
72. Wolfgang Kemp, “Narrative,” in Robert S. Nelson and Richard Schiff, eds., *Critical Terms for Art History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 72.
73. For discussions of Gregory’s injunction, see Celia M. Chazelle, “Pictures, Books, and the Illiterate: Pope Gregory I’s Letters to Serenus of Marseilles,” *Word & Image* 6 (1990): 138–53; Lawrence G. Duggan, “Was Art Really the ‘Book of the Illiterate?’,” *Word & Image* 5 (1989): 227–51; and Chazelle, “Memory, Instruction, Worship: Gregory’s Influence on Early Medieval Doctrines of the Artistic Image,” in John C. Cavadini, ed., *Gregory the Great: A Symposium* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 1995), 181–215.
74. Didi-Huberman, *Fra Angelico*, 25.
75. I cite two instances. In the sphere of Byzantine hagiography, see Derek Krueger, *Writing and Holiness: The Practice of Authorship in the Early Christian East* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); and in the realm of the Latin West, see Sarah Kay, *Courtly Contradictions: The Emergence of the Literary Object in the Twelfth Century* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), parts of which treats hagiographic literature.

### Chapter One: The Saint in the Text

1. For an account of this event, see Niketas Stethatos, *Un grand mystique byzantin: Vie de Syméon le Nouveau Théologien (949–1022) par Nicéas Stéthatos*, ed. I. Hausherr, trans. in collaboration with G. Horn, *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 45 (Rome: Pont. Institutum orientalium studiorum, 1928): 98–128.
2. The cult of Symeon Eulabes had already been subjected to patriarchal scrutiny in 1001 or 1002, when Patriarch Sergios II had required the New Theologian to explain the reasons behind its development. In 1003 Stephen of Nicomedia challenged the cult, questioning Eulabes’ status as a holy man. Eulabes’ icon, however, was not specifically mentioned. See *Vie de Syméon*, 98–118.
3. The specific term used in the text is “syneikonismos.” *Vie de Syméon*, 121.
4. *Vie de Syméon*, 124. Symeon addresses the icon as an image of Christ, saying, “Saint Symeon, thanks to the participation of the Holy Spirit you have come to resemble the icon of my Lord Jesus Christ. . . . You bear Christ within yourself . . . . Bring me the strength that I need to struggle on behalf of you and your image. Or rather on behalf of Christ.”
5. Charles Barber, “Icon and Portrait in the Trial of Symeon the New Theologian,” in A. Eastmond and L. James, eds., *Icon and Word: The Power of Images in Byzantium: Studies Presented to Robin Cormack* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 25–34. See also Barber, “Symeon the New Theologian: Seeing beyond Painting,” in

- Contesting the Logic of Painting: Art and Understanding in Eleventh Century Byzantium* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 54–9.
6. *Vie de Syméon*, 126–8.
  7. The literature on Byzantine iconoclasm is vast. See note 44 of Introduction. For the most recent literature, see Jaroslav Pelikan, *Imago Dei: The Byzantine Apologia for Icons* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011); Thomas F. X. Noble, *Images, Iconoclasm and the Carolingians* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009); Leslie Brubaker and John Haldon, eds., *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era, c. 680–850: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); and Jaś Elsner, “Iconoclasm as Discourse: From Antiquity to Byzantium,” *Art Bulletin* 94, 3 (2012): 368–94.
  8. See the entire study by Barber, *Contesting the Logic of Painting*.
  9. Robin Cormack, *Writing in Gold: Byzantine Society and Its Icons* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); and Alexander Kazhdan and Henry Maguire, “Byzantine Hagiographical Texts as Sources on Art,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 45 (1991): 1–22.
  10. Barber, “Leo of Chalcedon, Euthymios Zigabenos and the Return to the Past,” in *Contesting the Logic of Painting*, 131–57.
  11. Paul Magdalino, “The Byzantine Holy Man in the Twelfth Century,” in S. Hackel, ed., *The Byzantine Saint*, University of Birmingham Fourteenth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies (London: Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius, 1981), 51–66.
  12. Alice-Mary Talbot, ed., *Byzantine Defenders of Images: Eight Saints’ Lives in English Translation* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1998), xx.
  13. See “Life of the Patriarch Nikephoros I of Constantinople,” trans. Elizabeth A. Fisher in *ibid.*, 141–2.
  14. See the discussion of the Life of Theodore of Sykeon in Paroma Chatterjee, “Problem Portraits: The Ambivalence of Visual Representation in Byzantium,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 40:2 (2010): 223–47.
  15. Charles Barber, *Figure and Likeness: On the Limits of Representation in Byzantine Iconoclasm* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), 121. For the original text, see Patriarch Nikephoros, *PG* 100: 277.
  16. For this notion, see Patriarch Nikephoros, *PG* 100: 277 CD. See also the discussion in Kenneth Parry, *Depicting the Word: Byzantine Iconophile Thought of the Eighth and Ninth Centuries* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 62, which explores the understanding that, if the prototype should disappear, the relation between image and prototype does not disappear along with it. My contention, as we shall see, is that the disappearance of the prototype weakens – and thereby complicates – the relation between itself and its representation/s.
  17. See Holger A. Klein, “Sacred Relics and Imperial Ceremonies at the Great Palace of Constantinople,” in Franz Alto Bauer, ed., *Visualisierungen von Herrschaft: Frühmittelalterliche Residenzen: Gestalt und Zeremoniell*, *BYZAS* 5 (Istanbul: Ege Yayınları, 2006), 93, where he observes that while the imperial relic collection was continuously expanded over time, it was not until the ninth and tenth centuries that the imperial residence was transformed into a *locus sanctus* and the “House of Christ.” For a discussion of the importance accorded to relics during and after Iconoclasm, see Brubaker and Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era*, 38–9.
  18. Bissera V. Pentcheva, *The Sensual Icon: Art, Ritual, and the Senses in Byzantium* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010), 14–15.

19. For a thorough discussion of the conflicting views of John of Damascus and Patriarch Nikephoros, see Charles Barber, “From Image into Art: Art after Byzantine Iconoclasm,” *Gesta* 34 (1995): 5–10. For the iconophile writings of John of Damascus, see St. John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images: Three Apologies against Those Who Attack the Divine Images*, trans. D. Anderson (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1980). For Patriarch Nikephoros’s views, see *PG* 100: 205–533. For a French translation, see *Discours contre les iconoclastes: Discussion et réfutation des bavardages ignares, athées et tout à fait creux de l’irreligieux Mamon contre l’incarnation de Dieu le verbe notre sauveur / de notre bienheureux père et archevêque de Constantinople Nicéphore*, trans. Marie-José Mondzain-Baudinet (Paris: Klincksieck, 1989).
20. For a volume dedicated to a discussion of the artist in Byzantium, see Michele Bacci, ed., *L’artista a Bisanzio e nel mondo cristiano-orientale* (Pisa: Edizioni della Normale, 2007).
21. John Yiannias, “A Reexamination of the ‘Art Statute’ in the Acts of Nicaea II,” *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 80 (1987): 348–59. See also Barber, *Figure and Likeness*, 111–15.
22. Derek Krueger, *Writing and Holiness: The Practice of Authorship in the Early Christian East* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).
23. Henry Maguire, *Art and Eloquence in Byzantium* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981).
24. Judith Waring, “Monastic Reading in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries: Divine Ascent or Byzantine Fall?,” in Margaret M. Mullett and Anthony Kirby, eds., *Work and Worship at the Theotokos Evergetis: Papers of the Fourth Belfast Byzantine International Colloquium* (Belfast: Belfast Byzantine Enterprises, 1997), 400–20.
25. Leslie Brubaker, “Perception and Conception: Art, Theory, and Culture in Ninth-Century Byzantium,” *Word & Image* 5 (1989): 19–32.
26. See *ibid.*, 19–32; and Cynthia Hahn, *Portrayed on the Heart: Narrative Effect in Pictorial Lives of Saints from the Tenth through the Thirteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 30–8.
27. Chatterjee, “Problem Portraits: The Ambivalence of Visual Representation in Byzantium,” 223–47.
28. See “Life of St. Theodora of Thessalonike,” trans. Alice-Mary Talbot, in Alice-Mary Talbot, ed., *Holy Women of Byzantium: Ten Saints’ Lives in English Translation* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1996), 209–11.
29. For iconophile arguments setting forth the relative acts of worship appropriate to diverse objects, see Patriarch Nikephoros, *PG* 100: 392, and Theodori Studitae, *PG* 99: 348.
30. Robert S. Nelson, “To Say and To See: Ekphrasis and Vision in Byzantium,” in Nelson, ed., *Visuality Before and Beyond the Renaissance: Seeing as Others Saw* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 143–68.
31. “Life of Theodora of Thessalonike,” trans. Alice-Mary Talbot, 210.
32. Nelson, “To Say and To See,” 153, which discusses intromission as well.
33. *Ibid.*, 143–68.
34. Niketas Stethatos, “On the Inner Nature of Things and on the Purification of the Intellect: One Hundred Texts,” in G. E. H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware, trans. and eds., *The Philokalia: The Complete Text Compiled by St. Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain and St. Makarios of Corinth*, vol.4 (London: Faber and Faber, 1995), 124.

35. For a discussion of some of these issues in Byzantine novels, see Susan MacAlister, *Dreams and Suicides: The Greek Novel from Antiquity to the Byzantine Empire* (London: Routledge, 1996). For studies on the novels that incorporate elements related to vision, see Panagiotis Roilos, *Amphoteroglossia: A Poetics of the Twelfth-Century Medieval Greek Novel* (Washington, DC: Center for Hellenic Studies, 2005); and Ingela Nilsson, *Erotic Pathos, Rhetorical Pleasure: Narrative Technique and Mimesis in Eumathios Makrembolites' Hysmine & Hysminias* (Uppsala: Uppsala University, 2001).
36. See Patricia Cox Miller, *Dreams in Late Antiquity: Studies in the Imagination of a Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994). For a specifically Byzantine take on dreams, see Maria V. Mavroudi, *A Byzantine Book on Dream Interpretation: The Oneirocriticon of Achmet and Its Arabic Sources* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), and Christine Angelidi, "The Writing of Dreams: A Note on Psellos' Funeral Oration for His Mother," in David Jenkins and Charles Barber, eds., *Reading Michael Psellos* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 153–66.
37. Mavroudi, *A Byzantine Book on Dream Interpretation*, 270. Mavroudi claims that the chapter on icons in the *Oneirocriticon* was inserted at a later date; see pp. 284–5.
38. Yiannias, "A Reexamination of the 'Art Statute' in the Acts of Nicaea II," 348–59.
39. See Paul Hetherington, *The "Painter's Manual" of Dionysios of Fourna: An English Translation with Commentary of Cod. Gr. 708 in the Saltykov-Schedrin State Public Library, Leningrad* (London: Sagittarius Press, 1974).
40. Henry Maguire, *The Icons of Their Bodies: Saints and Their Images in Byzantium* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 1–47.
41. Theodori Studitae, *PG* 99: 500–1.
42. Nikephoros, *PG* 100: 280.
43. Barber, *Figure and Likeness*, 35–7.
44. For the most recent studies on the Mandylion, see Gerhard Wolf and Herbert L. Kessler, eds., *The Holy Face and the Paradox of Representation: Papers from a Colloquium Held at the Bibliotheca Hertziana, Rome, and the Villa Spelman, Florence, 1996* (Bologna: Nuova Alfa, 1998), and Gerhard Wolf, C. D. Bozzo, and Anna Rosa Calderoni Massetti, eds., *Mandilio: Intorno al Sacro Volto, da Bisanzio a Genova* (Milan: Skira, 2004).
45. This reversal, however, obtains in the case of the famous Tuesday and Friday miracles performed by the Virgin of the Hodegon monastery and the Blachernai churches respectively. In both these miracles, animation was made manifest at the borders of the icon or its edges – or, as Alexei Lidov puts it, in the space in front of the icons. See Lidov, "The Flying Hodegetria: The Miraculous Icon as Bearer of Space," in E. Thunø and G. Wolf, eds., *The Miraculous Image in the Late Middle Ages and Renaissance* (Rome: L'Erma di Bretschneider, 2004), 285–6.
46. See the introduction to the "Life of St. Mary the Younger," trans. Angeliki E. Laiou, in Talbot, *Holy Women of Byzantium*, 242–5.
47. "Life of St. Mary the Younger," 271–3. The Greek text is included in "Vita Mariae Junioris," *Acta Sanctorum Bollandiana* (Brussels: 1643–), Novembris IV:692–705.
48. *Ibid.*, 272.
49. *Ibid.*, 280.
50. See the appendix to the "Life of St. Theodora of Thessalonike," 218–25.
51. Charalambos Bakirtzis, "Pilgrimage to Thessalonike: The Tomb of St. Demetrios," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 56 (2002): 175–92.

52. *Ibid.*, 178.
53. William D. Wixom, catalog entry “Enkolpion with Saint Demetrios and Saint Nestor,” in Helen C. Evans and William D. Wixom, eds., *The Glory of Byzantium: Art and Culture of the Middle Byzantine Era, A.D. 843–1261* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1997), 161–2.
54. See Cynthia Hahn, “What Do Reliquaries Do for Relics?,” *Numen* 57 (2010): 284–316, especially for a discussion on the ways in which reliquaries hide their contents.
55. Miller, *Dreams in Late Antiquity*, 240.
56. Denis F. Sullivan, ed., *The Life of Saint Nikon: Text, Translation, and Commentary* (Brookline, MA: Hellenic College Press, 1987).
57. Charles Barber, “Writing on the Body: Memory, Desire, and the Holy in Iconoclasm,” in Liz James, ed., *Desire and Denial in Byzantium: Papers from the Thirty-First Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), 111–20. See also the discussion of the holy portrait as a sign of presence in the pre-Iconoclastic era in Brubaker and Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era*, 781–2.
58. Charles Barber, “Mimesis and Memory in the Narthex Mosaics of the Nea Moni at Chios,” *Art History* 24 (2001): 323–37.
59. Basil the Great, *PG* 32: 229.
60. For the pervasiveness of ekphrasis and its characterization as a Byzantine vice, see Anthony Kaldellis, *Hellenism in Byzantium. The Transformations of Greek Identity and the Reception of the Classical Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 278.
61. Literature on ekphrasis is vast. For studies on Byzantine ekphrasis, see Ruth Macrides and Paul Magdalino, “The Architecture of Ekphrasis: Construction and Context of Paul the Silentiary’s Poem on Hagia Sophia,” *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 12 (1988): 47–82; Liz James and Ruth Webb, “‘To Understand Ultimate Things and Enter Secret Places’: Ekphrasis and Art in Byzantium,” *Art History* 14 (1991): 1–17; Ruth Webb, “The Aesthetics of Sacred Space: Narrative, Metaphor, and Motion in Ekphraseis of Church Buildings,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 53 (1999): 53–74; Nelson, “To Say and To See,” 143–68; Brubaker, “Perception and Conception,” 19–32; Ruth Webb, “Accomplishing the Picture: Ekphrasis, Mimesis, and Martyrdom in Asterios of Amaseia,” in Liz James, ed., *Art and Text in Byzantine Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 13–32; and Ruth Webb, *Ekphrasis, Imagination, and Persuasion in Ancient Rhetorical Theory and Practice* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009).
62. See Brubaker, “Perception and Conception,” 19–32; and Webb, “Accomplishing the Picture,” 13–32.
63. As Ruth Webb notes, “An ekphrasis was distinguished from a *diegesis* not by the nature of the subject matter, but by the degree of reference to visible phenomena and the effect it had on the audience.” *Ekphrasis, Imagination, and Persuasion in Ancient Rhetorical Theory and Practice*, 67.
64. Claudia Rapp, “Storytelling as Spiritual Communication in Early Greek Hagiography: The Use of *Diegesis*,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 6:3 (1998): 431–48.
65. Maguire, *Icons of Their Bodies*, 100–45.
66. Karen Boston, “The Power of Inscriptions and the Trouble with Texts,” in Eastmond and James, *Icon and Word*, 35–57.

67. See Maguire, *Icons of Their Bodies*, 9.
68. See Wolf, “From Mandylion to Veronica: Picturing the ‘Disembodied’ Face and Disseminating the True Image of Christ in the Latin West,” in Wolf and Kessler, *The Holy Face and the Paradox of Representation*, 153–79.
69. Herbert L. Kessler, “Configuring the invisible by copying the Holy Face,” in Wolf and Kessler, *The Holy Face and the Paradox of Representation*, 141–2.
70. Henry G. Liddell and Robert Scott, eds., *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon*, 7th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003). See also the discussion in Bissera V. Pentcheva, “The Performative Icon,” *Art Bulletin* 88:4 (2006): 638.
71. Liz James, “Color and Meaning in Byzantium,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 11 (2003): 223–33.
72. Herbert L. Kessler, “Medieval Art as Argument,” in *Spiritual Seeing. Picturing God’s Invisibility in Medieval Art* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 53–63.
73. Pentcheva, *The Sensual Icon*, 57–96. See also the important comments by Charles Barber, in the review of *The Sensual Icon*, in *Art Bulletin* 93:3 (2011): 370–3.
74. Stratis Papaioannou, “Animate Statues: Aesthetics and Movement,” in Jenkins and Barber, *Reading Michael Psellos*, 117–30.
75. Jan Olof Rosenqvist, *The Life of St. Irene Abbess of Chrysobalanton: A Critical Edition with Introduction, Translation, Notes, and Indices* (Uppsala: Uppsala University, 1986).
76. Theodori Studitae, PG 99: 360D, 361B. See also the discussion in Parry, *Depicting the Word*, 52–61; and Barber, *Figure and Likeness*, 112–15, 123–8.
77. See Parry, *Depicting the Word*, 44–51, and Barber, *Figure and Likeness*, 39–59.
78. See the descriptions included in the *Parastaseis Syntomoi Chronikai*, ed. Averil Cameron and Judith Herrin (Leiden: Brill, 1984); and Nicetas Choniates, *De Signis*, in *O City of Byzantium. Annals of Nicetas Choniates*, ed. Harry J. Magoulias (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1984).
79. Henry Maguire, “Magic and the Christian Image,” in Maguire, ed., *Byzantine Magic* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1995).
80. Nikephoros, PG 100: 277A.
81. Barber, *Figure and Likeness*, 101. For the Greek text see PG 100: 428C–433A.
82. Barber, *Figure and Likeness*, 111.
83. Theophylactos Bulgariae Archiepiscopus, *Vita S. Clementis Bulgariae Archiepiscopi*, in PG 126: 1194–1239. See also the translation in *Kiril and Methodius: Founders of Slavonic Writing*, ed. Ivan Duichev, trans. Spass Nikolov (Boulder: East European Monographs, 1985), 81–126.
84. St. John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images*, 20.
85. ἀλλ’ ἢ τοὺς παῖδας ἐδίδασκε καὶ τοῦτο ποικίλως, τοῖς μὲν τὸν τῶν γραμμάτων χαρακτῆρα γνωρίζων, τοῖς δὲ τὸν τῶν γεγραμμένων νοῦν σαφηνίζων, ἄλλοις πρὸς τὸ γράφειν τὰς χεῖρας τυπῶν.
86. Basil of Caesarea, *Epistolae*, PG 96: 352B.
87. See Theodori Studitae, PG 99: 360D. For a full discussion, see Parry, *Depicting the Word*, 57–60.
88. See the introduction to the “Life of St. Theodora of Thessalonike,” 161.
89. See the introduction to the “Life of St. Mary the Younger,” 245–7.
90. Margaret M. Mullett, *Theophylact of Ochrid: Reading the Letters of a Byzantine Archbishop* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1997).

91. For a comprehensive discussion of the Tuesday miracle of the Hodegetria, see Lidov, “The Flying Hodegetria,” 291–321. For discussions of the Friday miracle of the Blachernai icon, see Eustratios N. Papaioannou, “The ‘Usual Miracle’ and an Unusual Image: Psellos and the Icons of Blachernai,” *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 51 (2001): 177–88; Bissera V. Pentcheva, *Icons and Power. The Mother of God in Byzantium* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), 154–61; and Barber, *Contesting the Logic of Painting*, 80–3.
92. The *Life of Nikon*, 63, for instance, narrates the story of a man who prays before a portrait of the saint, is transported mentally to the shrine, and experiences a healing miracle there.

### Chapter Two: The Saint in the Image

1. Sergei A. Ivanov, *Holy Fools in Byzantium and Beyond*, trans. Simon Franklin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 212–13.
2. Paul Magdalino, “The Byzantine Holy Man in the Twelfth Century,” in S. Hackel, ed., *The Byzantine Saint*, University of Birmingham Fourteenth Spring Symposium Studies (London: Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius, 1981), 51–66.
3. *Ibid.*, 54–5.
4. *Ibid.*, 56–9.
5. See John Turner, “The Formation of Monks at St. Mamas and at the Theotokos Evergetis,” in Margaret M. Mullett and Anthony Kirby, eds., *Work and Worship at the Theotokos Evergetis, 1050–1200*, Belfast Byzantine Texts and Translations, 6.2 (Belfast: Belfast Byzantine Enterprises, 1997), 124–33.
6. Sergei Ivanov makes the same point when he states that Balsamon “had no . . . precise criteria for distinguishing true holy fools from fakes.” See Ivanov, *Holy Fools in Byzantium and Beyond*, 214.
7. Hans-Georg Beck, *Kirche und theologische Literatur im byzantinischen Reich* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1959), 271.
8. See Nancy P. Ševčenko, “The *Vita* Icon and the Painter as Hagiographer,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 53 (1999): 149–65; and “*Vita* Icons and ‘Decorated’ Icons of the Komnenian Period,” in Bertrand Davezac, ed., *Four Icons in the Menil Collection* (Houston: Menil Foundation, 1992), 57–69. For a discussion of the possible relationships between the *vita* icons and the Monastery of St. Catherine, Egypt, where several of them are located, see Paroma Chatterjee, “Archive and Atelier: Sinai and the Case of the Narrative Icon,” in Sharon E.J. Gerstel and Robert S. Nelson, eds., *Approaching the Holy Mountain: Art and Liturgy at St. Catherine’s Monastery in the Sinai* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), 319–44.
9. For an overview of the development of Passion imagery, see Hans Belting, *The Image and Its Public in the Middle Ages: Form and Function of Early Paintings of the Passion*, trans. Mark Bartusis and Raymond Meyer (New Rochelle, NY: Aristide D. Caratzas, 1990). Also see Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art*, trans. E. Jephcott (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 268, where it is remarked: “A new need for deep feeling and human drama was clearly growing in eleventh-century liturgy, literature, and painting.”
10. Sharon E.J. Gerstel, *Beholding the Sacred Mysteries: Programs of the Byzantine Sanctuary* (Seattle: College Art Association and University of Washington Press, 1999), 40–4.



11. For the physical and spiritual properties of light as harnessed in Byzantine churches, see Robert S. Nelson, “Where God Walked and Monks Pray,” in Robert S. Nelson and Kristen M. Collins, eds., *Holy Image, Hallowed Ground: Icons from the Sinai* (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2006), 16–33.
12. Hans Belting, “An Image and Its Function in the Liturgy: The Man of Sorrows in Byzantium,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 34–35 (1980–81): 1–16.
13. Henry Maguire, *Art and Eloquence in Byzantium* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981), 53–83.
14. *Ibid.*, 101–8.
15. See Gerstel, *Beholding the Sacred Mysteries*, and the catalog entry in Nelson and Collins, *Holy Image, Hallowed Ground*, 171–2.
16. For an extensive discussion of the templon, see Sharon E.J. Gerstel, “An Alternate View of the Late Byzantine Sanctuary Screen,” in Gerstel, ed., *Thresholds of the Sacred. Architectural, Art Historical, Liturgical, and Theological Perspectives on Religious Screens, East and West* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2006), 135–62.
17. On the debates over the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist in Byzantium, see the note by Robert F. Taft, “Eucharist,” in Alexander P. Kazhdan, ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).
18. See Nancy P. Ševčenko, *Illustrated Manuscripts of the Metaphrastian Menologion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 1. See also Kurt Weitzmann, “Illustrations to the Lives of the Five Martyrs of Sebaste,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 33 (1979): 95–112.
19. For a comprehensive discussion of Metaphrastes’ project, see Christian Hoegel, *Symeon Metaphrastes: Rewriting and Canonization* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2002).
20. Ševčenko, *Illustrated Manuscripts of the Metaphrastian Menologion*, 3–4.
21. Nancy P. Ševčenko, “The Walters ‘Imperial’ Menologion,” *Journal of the Walters Art Gallery* 51 (1993): 43–64.
22. Ševčenko, “Catalog of Manuscripts,” in *Illustrated Manuscripts of the Metaphrastian Menologion*, 11–180.
23. *Ibid.*, 3.
24. “Life of St. Theoktiste of Lesbos,” trans. Angela C. Hero, in Alice-Mary Talbot, ed., *Holy Women of Byzantium: Ten Saints’ Lives in English Translation* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1996), 104–5.
25. The role of memory and its intricate connection with violence (literal and figurative) in Byzantium has not been addressed. A useful discussion of violence in ekphrastic techniques and social memory may be found in Ruth Webb, “Accomplishing the Picture: Ekphrasis, Mimesis, and Martyrdom in Asterios of Amaseia,” in Liz James, ed., *Art and Text in Byzantine Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 13–32. The classic study of memory in the medieval period is by Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). For other influential studies on memory in the classical and medieval world, see Frances Yates, *The Art of Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974); and Jocelyn Penny Small, *Wax Tablets of the Mind: Cognitive Studies of Memory and Literacy in Classical Antiquity* (New York: Routledge, 1997).
26. Ševčenko, *Illustrated Manuscripts of the Metaphrastian Menologion*, 52.
27. See the catalogs by George and Maria Soteriou, *Icônes du Mont Sinâï*, vol. 1 (Athens, 1956–8), especially objects 126–45.

28. Weitzmann, "Illustrations to the Lives of the Five Martyrs of Sebaste," 101.
29. See the translated excerpt in Cyril Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire, 312–1453* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), 137.
30. Weitzmann, "Fragments of an Early St. Nicholas Triptych on Mt. Sinai," in *Studies in the Arts at Sinai: Essays* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982), 211–33.
31. For an account of Nicholas's life and the textual sources of the episodes depicted, see Nancy P. Ševčenko, *The Life of Saint Nicholas in Byzantine Art* (Turin: Bottega d'Erasmus, 1983), 25–7, 29.
32. *Ibid.*, 109–10.
33. For literature on the Eustratios beam, see Kurt Weitzmann, "Icon Programs of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries at Sinai," *Δελτίον της Χριστιανικής Αρχαιολογικής Ηεταρείας*, 4th ser., 12 (1984; published, 1986): 63–116. For the most recent literature, see the catalog description by Nancy P. Ševčenko, "Epistyle with the Miracles of Saint Eustratios," in Nelson and Collins, *Holy Image, Hallowed Ground*, 174–7.
34. Henry Maguire, *The Icons of Their Bodies: Saints and Their Images in Byzantium* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 100–45.
35. Some of these issues are discussed in relation to the slide lecture and representation in Robert S. Nelson, "The Slide Lecture, or the Work of Art 'History' in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," *Critical Inquiry* 26:3 (Spring 2000): 414–34.
36. See the comprehensive discussion of the "spatial icon" in Otto Demus, *Byzantine Mosaic Decoration: Aspects of Monumental Art in Byzantium* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1964).
37. A discussion of extramission may be found in Robert S. Nelson, "To Say and To See: Ekphrasis and Vision in Byzantium," in Nelson, ed., *Visuality Before and Beyond the Renaissance: Seeing as Others Saw* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 143–68.
38. Anthony Cutler, "Under the Sign of the Deisis: On the Question of Representativeness in Medieval Art and Literature," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 41 (1987): 145–54.
39. The most comprehensive study of the Byzantine *vita* icon and its possible ancestors is by Ševčenko, "The *Vita* Icon and the Painter as Hagiographer," 149–65, and "Vita Icons and 'Decorated' Icons of the Komnenian Period," 57–69.
40. An image in the Augustinian Gospels, dated to the sixth century and currently located in Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, comes closest to the *vita* icon format. The leaf depicting St. Luke positions the evangelist at the center of the folio with episodes from his life on either side. The small scenes buttress the architectural framework in which Luke sits. Yet here too the scenes remain relatively detached and are, thus, different from the immediacy of the *vita* icons because of the distance furnished by the architecture. The slender pillars separate the portrait of Luke from the episodes, and the latter do not continue on the top and bottom of the image. In contrast, the all-encompassing nature of the scenes on the *vita* images, their gridlike continuity all around the central portrait is integral to their unique power.
41. See Ševčenko, "Vita Icons and 'Decorated' Icons of the Komnenian Period," 57.
42. See Ševčenko's comments in "The *Vita* Icon and the Painter as Hagiographer," 150, n. 2.

43. Annemarie Weyl Carr, “The Vita Icon of Saint Basil: Notes on a Byzantine Object,” in Bertrand Davezac, ed., *Four Icons in the Menil Collection* (Houston: Menil Foundation, 1992), 102.
44. Ševčenko, “The Vita Icon and the Painter as Hagiographer,” 159.
45. Titos Papamastorakis, “Pictorial Lives. Narrative in Thirteenth-Century Vita Icons,” *Museio Benaki* 7 (2008): 33–65.
46. For literature on Byzantine frames, see André Grabar, *Les revêtements en or et en argent des icônes byzantines du Moyen Age* (Venice: Institut hellénique d’études byzantines et post-byzantines, 1975); Jannic Durand, “Precious-Metal Icon Revetments,” in Helen C. Evans, ed., *Byzantium: Faith and Power (1261–1557)* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2004), 243–51; and Glenn Peers, *Sacred Shock: Framing Sacred Experience in Byzantium* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005).
47. Ševčenko, “Vita Icons and ‘Decorated’ Icons of the Komnenian Period,” 62–7.
48. Nancy P. Ševčenko, “The Evergetis *Synaxarion* and the Celebration of a Saint in Twelfth-Century Art and Liturgy,” in Mullett and Kirby, *Work and Worship at the Theotokos Evergetis*, 386–99.
49. *Ibid.*, 398.
50. *Ibid.*
51. See Ševčenko, *The Life of Saint Nicholas in Byzantine Art*, 79–80.
52. *Ibid.*, 121.
53. *Ibid.*, 117.
54. For a discussion of the import of different kinds of liturgical dress, see Warren T. Woodfin, *The Embodied Icon: Liturgical Vestments and Sacramental Power in Byzantium* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).
55. For a discussion of the depictions of children on the Nicholas icon, see Cecily Hennessy, *Images of Children in Byzantium* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008), 124–7, although Hennessy does not point out the similarities between the depiction of Nicholas as a child and Basil, the child kidnapped by the Saracens.
56. Theodori Studitae, PG 99: 360D, 361 B. For a full discussion of homonyms and synonyms in Theodore’s philosophy, see Kenneth Parry, *Depicting the Word: Byzantine Iconophile Thought of the Eighth and Ninth Centuries* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 57–60.
57. For a discussion of puns, see Catherine Bates, “The Point of Puns,” *Modern Philology*, 96:4 (May 1999): 421–38.
58. For a comprehensive list of all the icons of St. George, see Temily Mark-Weiner, “Narrative Cycles of the Life of St. George in Byzantine Art” (Ph.D. dissertation, Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 1978). For a discussion of the depiction of warrior saints, see Christopher Walter, *The Warrior Saints in Byzantine Art and Tradition* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003).
59. Maguire, *The Icons of Their Bodies*, 48–99.
60. See the detailed description of the figure by Nancy P. Ševčenko in the catalog entry, “Icon of Saint George with Scenes of His Passion and Miracles,” in Evans, *Byzantium: Faith and Power*, 372–3.
61. Αγιε του θ(εου) βοηθι τον σων δουλον Ιω(άννην) μ(ονα)χ(όν) κ(αί) ηρεαν τον εκ ποθου κτισαντα την σιν ηκονα τον ηβρι.

62. For a comprehensive discussion of images of falling idols, see Michael Camille, *The Gothic Idol: Ideology and Image-Making in Medieval Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).
63. Peers, *Sacred Shock: Framing Visual Experience in Byzantium*, 86–92.
64. See the note by Annemarie Weyl Carr, “Hetoimasias,” in Kazhdan, *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*. See also Natalia B. Teteriatnikov, “The Mosaics of the Eastern Arch of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople: Program and Liturgy,” *Gesta* 52:1 (2013): 69–72.
65. Nancy P. Ševčenko, “The Representation of Donors and Holy Figures on Four Byzantine Icons,” *Deltion tes Christianikes Archaialogikes Hetaireias* 17 (1993–4): 160.
66. The Baptist’s relics were preserved in Constantinople. The Russian pilgrim, Anthony of Novgorod, reported seeing the upper part of the Baptist’s head in the church of the Blachernai, and his face relic in the Stoudios monastery church. See M. Ehrhard, “Le livre du pèlerin, d’ Antoine de Novgorod,” *Romania* 58 (1932): 58.
67. For literature on the panel, see Charles Barber, “Regarding Prayer: Contemplating an Icon of John the Forerunner,” in Gerstel and Nelson, *Approaching the Holy Mountain*, 305–17; Annemarie Weyl Carr, “The Face Relics of John the Baptist in Byzantium and the West,” *Gesta* 46 (2007): 159–78. A brief discussion is also given in Bissera V. Pentcheva, “What Is a Byzantine Icon? Constantinople versus Sinai,” in Paul Stephenson, ed., *The Byzantine World* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 278–81.
68. Carr, “The Face Relics of John the Baptist,” 161–3.
69. *Ibid.*
70. A brief discussion of this icon may be found in Ioli Kalavrezou, “Helping Hands for the Empire: Imperial Ceremonies and the Cult of Relics at the Byzantine Court,” in Henry Maguire, ed., *Byzantine Court Culture from 829–1204* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1997), 71.
71. Ševčenko, “The *Vita* Icon and the Painter as Hagiographer,” 161.
72. See Chatterjee, “Archive and Atelier: Sinai and the Case of the Narrative Icon,” 319–44.
73. The texts contained in the *Philokalia* give a good indication of these concerns. See G. E. H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware, trans. and eds., *The Philokalia: The Complete Text Compiled by St. Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain and St. Makarios of Corinth*, vol. 4 (London: Faber and Faber, 1995).
74. Gregory of Sinai, “On Commandments and Doctrines, Warnings and Promises; on Thoughts, Passions and Virtues, and Also on Stillness and Prayer: One Hundred and Thirty-Seven Texts,” in *The Philokalia*, 224–5.
75. Ševčenko, “The *Vita* Icon and the Painter as Hagiographer,” 150.
76. For studies on the Mandylion, see Gerhard Wolf and Herbert L. Kessler, eds., *The Holy Face and the Paradox of Representation: Papers from a Colloquium Held at the Bibliotheca Hertziana, Rome, and the Villa Spelman, Florence, 1996* (Bologna: Nuova Alfa, 1998), and Wolf, C. D. Bozzo, and Anna Rosa Calderoni Massetti, *Mandilino: Intorno al Sacro Volto, da Bisanzio a Genova* (Milan: Skira, 2004).
77. Maguire, *The Icons of Their Bodies*, 137–45.

### Chapter Three: “Wrought by the Finger of God”

1. See “The Life of Saint Francis by Thomas of Celano,” in Regis J. Armstrong, J. A. Wayne Hellmann, and William J. Short, eds., *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*;

- The Saint* (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute of St. Bonaventure University, 1999), 1, 185–6, hereafter *FAED*.
2. See “The Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul by Thomas of Celano,” *FAED* 2, 249–50.
  3. See “The Assisi Compilation,” 131, and “The Major Legend of Saint Francis,” *FAED* 2, 547.
  4. See “The Life of Saint Francis by Thomas of Celano,” *FAED* 1, 263–5; “The Life of Saint Francis by Julian of Speyer,” *FAED* 1, 410; “The Legend of Three Companions,” *FAED* 2, 108; “The Treatise on the Miracles of Saint Francis by Thomas of Celano,” *FAED* 2, 402–3; and “The Major Legend of Saint Francis,” *FAED* 2, 632–3.
  5. This is a formulation in Rosalind B. Brooke, *The Image of St. Francis: Responses to Sainthood in the Thirteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 232.
  6. See Chiara Frugoni, *Francesco e l’invenzione delle stimmate. Una storia per parole e immagini fino a Bonaventura e Giotto* (Turin: Einaudi, 1993), 137–201; Brooke, *The Image of St. Francis*, 166, n. 13; and Arnold I. Davidson, “Miracles of Bodily Transformation, or How St. Francis Received the Stigmata,” *Critical Inquiry* 35:3 (Spring 2009): 451–80.
  7. Karl F. Morrison, “I Am You”: *The Hermeneutics of Empathy in Western Literature, Theology, and Art* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), xix–xxvi, 3–40.
  8. Giles Constable, *Three Studies in Medieval Religious and Social Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 179–93, 201–17.
  9. For discussions on Eucharistic change and the semiotic debates it entailed, see Brian Stock, *Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), 241–315; Gary Macy, *The Theologies of the Eucharist in the Early Scholastic Period: A Study of the Salvific Function of the Sacraments According to the Theologians, c. 1080–1220* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984); Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); J. Goering, “The Invention of Transubstantiation,” *Traditio* 46 (1991): 147–70; Celia M. Chazelle, “Figure, Character, and the Glorified Body in the Carolingian Eucharistic Controversy,” *Traditio* 47 (1992): 1–35; and Brigitte Miriam Bedos-Rezak, *When Ego Was Imago: Signs of Identity in the Middle Ages* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 102–7.
  10. “The Major Legend of Saint Francis,” *FAED* 2, 651.
  11. “The Life of Saint Francis by Julian of Speyer,” *FAED* 1, 410.
  12. Hans Belting, “Saint Francis and the Body as Image: An Anthropological Approach,” in Colum Hourihane, ed., *Looking Beyond: Visions, Dreams, and Insights in Medieval Art & History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 4.
  13. See Rosalind B. Brooke, ed. and trans., *Scripta Leonis, Rufini et Angeli sociorum S. Francisci: The Writings of Leo, Rufino and Angelo, Companions of St. Francis* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 104.
  14. Marta Madero, *Tabula Picta: Painting and Writing in Medieval Law*, trans. Monique Dascha Inciarte and Roland David Valayre (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).
  15. *Ibid.*, 5.
  16. *Ibid.*, 28–33.

17. *Ibid.*, 83.
18. See the argument in Chiara Frugoni, “Saint Francis, a Saint in Progress,” in Sandro Sticca, ed., *Saints: Studies in Hagiography* (Binghamton, NY: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1996), 164.
19. See “The Legend for Use in the Choir by Thomas of Celano,” *FAED* 1, 323.
20. *Scripta Leonis*, 104.
21. See Madero, *Tabula Picta*, 5–6.
22. “The Life of Saint Francis by Thomas of Celano,” *FAED* 1, 264–5.
23. Here one may also consider the role of medieval “books of secrets,” the writers of which purported “to reveal secrets jealously guarded by famous sages and experimenters, or locked up in the bosom of nature herself.” See William Eamon, *Science and the Secrets of Nature: Books of Secrets in Medieval and Early Modern Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 3. However, as Eamon and other scholars note, these “books of secrets” were manuals of technical knowledge that strove to reveal the workings of both natural and manufactured marvels, neither of which applied to Francis’s stigmata.
24. Frank Kermodé, “Secrets and Narrative Sequence,” *Critical Inquiry* 7:1 (Autumn 1980): 83–101.
25. *Ibid.*, 88.
26. J. Hillis Miller, “Conrad’s Secret,” in Miller, *Others* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 138.
27. André Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, trans. J. Birrell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 33–58.
28. For a discussion of the medieval eyewitness, see Andrea Frisch, *The Invention of the Eyewitness: Witnessing and Testimony in Early Modern France* (Chapel Hill: University of Chapel Hill Press, 2004), 21–40.
29. Walter Simons, “Reading a Saint’s Body: Rapture and Bodily Movement in the Vitae of Thirteenth-Century Beguines,” in Sarah Kay and Miri Rubin, eds., *Framing Medieval Bodies* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), 10.
30. See the reference in “The Life of Saint Francis by Thomas of Celano,” *FAED* 1, 290.
31. *Ibid.*, 187.
32. “The Life of Saint Francis by Julian of Speyer,” *FAED* 1, 410.
33. “The Life of Saint Francis by Thomas of Celano,” *FAED* 1, 187.
34. *Ibid.*, 187–8.
35. *Ibid.*, 244–5.
36. Michel de Certeau, *The Mystic Fable*, trans. Michael B. Smith (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 88.
37. “The Life of Saint Francis by Thomas of Celano,” *FAED* 1, 261.
38. *Ibid.*, 265.
39. *Ibid.*
40. *Ibid.*
41. *Ibid.*, 264–5. The Latin text is as follows: *Enimvero cum semel dictus frater Rufinus manum suam in sinum sanctissimi viri, ut eum scalperet, immisisset, dilapsa est manus eius, ut saepe contingit, ad dextrum latus ipsius, et occurrit ei pretiosam illam tangere cicatricem.*
42. *Ibid.*, 280.

43. [Ibid.](#)
44. [Ibid.](#)
45. The theme of the “secret” followed Francis into his grave and beyond. For a discussion of the secrecy shrouding the saint’s tomb in the late medieval and early modern period, see Donal Cooper, “In loco tutissimo et firmissimo’: The Tomb of St. Francis in History, Legend and Art,” in William R. Cook, ed., *The Art of the Franciscan Order in Italy* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 1–37, especially 9.
46. I am grateful to Fabio Barry for this insight.
47. See the discussion of Hugh of St. Victor’s text in Mary Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought: Meditation, Rhetoric, and the Making of Images, 400–1200* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 20–1.
48. Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought*, 21.
49. “The Life of Saint Francis by Julian of Speyer,” *FAED* 1, 417.
50. [Ibid.](#)
51. [Ibid.](#), 294.
52. “Sanctitatis Nova Signa,” *FAED* 1, 357.
53. “The Life of Saint Francis by Thomas of Celano,” *FAED* 1, 294.
54. “The Life of Saint Francis by Julian of Speyer,” *FAED* 1, 417.
55. For the description of the stigmata, see [ibid.](#), 410.
56. See the discussion in Brooke, *The Image of St. Francis*, 138–9.
57. “The Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul by Thomas of Celano,” *FAED* 2, 336.
58. “The Legend of Three Companions,” *FAED* 2, 108.
59. “The Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul by Thomas of Celano,” *FAED* 2, 336.
60. [Ibid.](#)
61. [Ibid.](#)
62. [Ibid.](#), 249.
63. [Ibid.](#), 249–50.
64. [Ibid.](#), 250.
65. “The Treatise on the Miracles of Saint Francis by Thomas of Celano,” *FAED* 2, 399.
66. [Ibid.](#), 401.
67. [Ibid.](#)
68. [Ibid.](#)
69. [Ibid.](#)
70. [Ibid.](#), 401–2.
71. [Ibid.](#), 402.
72. [Ibid.](#), 403.
73. [Ibid.](#)
74. [Ibid.](#), 418.
75. [Ibid.](#), 419.
76. [Ibid.](#), 403.
77. [Ibid.](#), 404.
78. “The Morning Sermon on Saint Francis. Preached at Paris, October 4, 1255,” *FAED* 2, 514.
79. [Ibid.](#)
80. Brigitte Miriam Bedos-Rezak, “In Search of a Semiotic Paradigm: The Matter of Sealing in Medieval Thought and Praxis (1050–1400),” in Noel Adams, John Cherry, and James Robinson, eds., *Good Impressions: Image and Authority in Medieval Seals*, British Museum Research Publication 168 (London: Trustees of

- the British Museum, 2008), 1. See also Verity Platt, “Making an Impression: Replication and the Ontology of the Graeco-Roman Seal Stone,” *Art History* 29:2 (2006): 233–57.
81. Bedos-Rezak, *When Ego was Imago*, 200.
  82. *Ibid.*, 203.
  83. “The Morning Sermon on Saint Francis, 1255,” *FAED* 2, 513.
  84. Emily Steiner, *Documentary Culture and the Making of Medieval English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 69.
  85. Ruth Wolff, “The Sealed Saint: Representations of Saint Francis of Assisi on Medieval Italian Seals,” in Adams, Cherry, and Robinson, *Good Impressions*, 95.
  86. *Ibid.*, 95.
  87. *Ibid.*, 96–7.
  88. For studies on the Mandylion, see Gerhard Wolf and Herbert L. Kessler, eds., *The Holy Face and the Paradox of Representation: Papers from a Colloquium Held at the Bibliotheca Hertziana, Rome, and the Villa Spelman, Florence, 1996* (Bologna: Nuova Alfa, 1998), and Wolf, C. D. Bozzo, and Anna Rosa Calderoni Massetti, eds., *Mandilino: Intorno al Sacro Volto, da Bisanzio a Genova* (Milan: Skira, 2004).
  89. “The Morning Sermon on Saint Francis, 1255,” *FAED* 2, 515.
  90. *Ibid.*, 516.
  91. “The Major Legend of Saint Francis,” *FAED* 2, 632.
  92. Davidson, “Miracles of Bodily Transformation,” 468.
  93. “The Life of Saint Francis by Thomas of Celano,” *FAED* 1, 263.
  94. “The Major Legend of Saint Francis,” *FAED* 2, 632.
  95. *Ibid.*
  96. “The Life of Saint Francis by Thomas of Celano,” *FAED* 1, 262–3.
  97. “The Major Legend of Saint Francis,” *FAED* 2, 632.
  98. *Ibid.*
  99. *Ibid.*, 633, 634.
  100. *Ibid.*, 558.
  101. *Ibid.*, 633.
  102. *Ibid.*, 636.
  103. “The Minor Legend of Saint Francis,” *FAED* 2, 710.

#### Chapter Four: Depicting Francis’s Secret

1. “The Treatise on the Miracles of St. Francis by Thomas of Celano,” in Regis J. Armstrong, J. A. Wayne Hellmann, and William J. Short, eds., *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents, vol. 2, The Founder* (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute of St. Bonaventure University, 2000), 405–6, hereafter *FAED*; “The Major Legend of Saint Francis by Bonaventure of Bagnoregio,” *FAED* 2, 652.
2. Julian Gardner, “The Louvre Stigmatisation and the problem of the narrative altarpiece,” *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 45 (1982): 217–47.
3. Rosalind B. Brooke, *The Image of St. Francis: Responses to Sainthood in the Thirteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 166–8.
4. Chiara Frugoni, *Francis of Assisi: A Life* (Turin: Einaudi, 1995), 124.
5. *Ibid.*
6. No less than nine papal bulls were issued commanding painters to depict the stigmata and condemning those who scratched them off. See André Vauchez, “Les stigmates de saint François et leurs détracteurs dans les derniers siècles du Moyen Age,” *Mélanges d’archéologie et d’histoire* 80 (1968): 595–625.



7. There is yet another anecdote about a cleric who, on seeing a painting of Francis with the stigmata, began to doubt the miracle. A blow to his hand cured him. See “The Treatise on the Miracles of St. Francis,” *FAED* 2, 404–5.
8. See Brooke, *The Image of St. Francis*, 161.
9. Cathleen Hoeniger, *The Renovation of Paintings in Tuscany, 1250–1500* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 81–2.
10. *Ibid.*, 80.
11. Bonaventure likens Francis’s body to a charter sealed by the stigmata when he remarks, “As it is the Pope’s practice to endorse documents with his seal, so Christ, having recognized the teaching of Saint Francis as his own, affixed the seal of his stigmata to his body, and thereby irrevocably confirmed his teaching.” See “The Morning Sermon on Saint Francis, Preached at Paris, October 4, 1255,” *FAED* 2, 513.
12. See G. W. Ahlquist and W. R. Cook, “The Representation of the Posthumous Miracles of St. Francis of Assisi in Thirteenth-Century Italian Painting,” in William R. Cook, ed., *The Art of the Franciscan Order in Italy* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 211–56; and Chiara Frugoni, *Francesco e l’invenzione delle stimmate. Una Storia per Parole e Immagini fino a Bonaventura e Giotto* (Turin: Einaudi, 1996), 341, where she interprets a particular scene as the combination of two separate episodes in Francis’s life.
13. On the classical qualities of the panel, see James Stubblebine, “Byzantine Influence in Thirteenth-Century Italian Panel Painting,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 20 (1966): 93; and Ernst H. Gombrich, “Bonaventura Berlinghieri’s Palmettes,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 39 (1976): 234–6. For a discussion of the classical influences in Giotto’s rendition of architecture, see Francesco Benelli, *The Architecture in Giotto’s Painting* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).
14. Henry Thode, *Franz von Assisi und die Anfänge der Kunst der Renaissance in Italien* (Berlin: Grote, 1885).
15. The most influential studies on the Franciscans have taken the trope of naturalism as a given. See the discussion in Anne Derbes, *Picturing the Passion in Late Medieval Italy: Narrative Painting, Franciscan Ideologies, and the Levant* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 16–24. The same may be said of the most recent scholarship on Francis. See Jill Bennett, “Stigmata and Sense Memory: St. Francis and the Affective Image,” *Art History* 24:1 (2001): 1–16, where Bennett acknowledges a certain degree of naturalism in late medieval paintings of Francis, even though her argument is designed to make a case for a different kind of pictorial organization that enables spectator participation; Beth A. Mulvaney, “Standing on the Threshold: Beholder and Vision in the Assisi Crib at Greccio,” 23–34, and Janet Snyder, “Bearing Witness: The Physical Expression of the Spiritual in the Narrative Cycle at Assisi,” 35–46, both in Cynthia Ho, Beth A. Mulvaney, and John K. Downey, eds., *Finding Saint Francis in Literature and Art* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Ahlquist and Cook, “The Representation of the Posthumous Miracles of St. Francis of Assisi in Thirteenth-Century Italian Painting,” 235, where it is remarked that the reason for different depictions of cityscapes and baths on the *vita* panels is because the artists tried to depict scenes that the audiences would be familiar with (again, an implicit nod toward naturalism); and Brooke, *The Image of St. Francis*, 174, where it is observed that “. . . there was an increasing tendency toward more concrete and naturalistic representations.” For a discussion of naturalism in early trecento painting (not confined to Franciscan images), see Gervase Rosser,

- “Beyond Naturalism in Art and Poetry: Duccio and Dante on the Road to Emmaus,” *Art History* 35:3 (2012): 475–97.
16. See Mulvaney’s excellent study, “The Beholder as Witness: The Crib at Greccio from the Upper Church of San Francesco at Assisi and the Franciscan Influence on Late Medieval Art in Italy,” in Cook, *The Art of the Franciscan Order in Italy*, 171.
  17. A recent study on the fourteenth-century Franciscan text, the *Meditationes Vitae Christi*, argues for this. See Mary Meany, “The Meditationes Vitae Christi as a Book of Prayer,” *Franciscan Studies* 64 (2006): 225–6. See also Holly Flora, *The Devout Belief of the Imagination: The Paris ‘Meditationes Vitae Christi’ and Female Franciscan Spirituality in Trecento Italy* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009); Mulvaney, “Standing on the Threshold,” 23–34; and Snyder, “Bearing Witness,” 35–46.
  18. See Daniel R. Lesnick, *Preaching in Medieval Florence: The Social World of Franciscan and Dominican Spirituality* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1989), 144–5, for differences between the “concreteness and palpability” of Franciscan preaching and illustration in comparison to the Dominicans. See also the discussion in Derbes, *Picturing the Passion in Late Medieval Italy*, 16–24.
  19. Amy Neff, “Byzantine Icons, Franciscan Prayer: Images of Intercession and Ascent in the Upper Church of San Francesco, Assisi,” in Timothy J. Johnson, ed., *Franciscans at Prayer* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 358.
  20. *Ibid.*, 358–9.
  21. Brooke, *The Image of St. Francis*, 176.
  22. One example is the Berardenga antependium, for literature on which see Michele Bacci, “The Berardenga Antependium and the Passio Ymaginis Office,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 61 (1998): 1–16.
  23. Jeryldene Wood, “Perceptions of Holiness in Thirteenth-Century Italian Painting: Clare of Assisi,” *Art History* 14:3 (1991): 306.
  24. “The Life of Saint Francis by Thomas of Celano,” *FAED* 1, 264.
  25. *Ibid.*, 280.
  26. Literature on narrative, affective devotion, and the Franciscans is immense. For a few important discussions, see Henk van Os, *Sieneese Altarpieces, 1215–1460: Form, Content, Function*, trans. Michael Hoyle (Groningen: Bouma’s Boekhuis, 1984), 67; Lesnick, *Preaching in Medieval Florence*, 144–5; Bennett, “Stigmata and Sense Memory,” 1–16; Anne Derbes and Amy Neff, “Italy, the Mendicant Orders, and the Byzantine Sphere,” in Helen C. Evans, ed., *Byzantium: Faith and Power (1261–1557)* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2004), 456–8.
  27. See Frugoni, *Francesco e l’invenzione delle stimmate*, 321; Derbes, *Picturing the Passion*, 16–34.
  28. Derbes, *Picturing the Passion*, 4. For a discussion of painted crosses, see Alice Ann Driscoll, “Alberto ‘Sotio,’ 1187, and Spoleto: The Umbrian Painted Cross in Italian Medieval Art” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 2005).
  29. The shift from Christus Triumphans to Christus Patiens is discussed by Derbes, *Picturing the Passion*, 5–34. For a comprehensive historical account of the shift, see Rachel Fulton, *From Judgement to Passion: Devotion to Christ and the Virgin Mary, 800–1200* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).
  30. For doubts about the side wound that extended to the papacy (and hence its exclusion from early images of Francis), see Brooke, *The Image of St. Francis*, 166.
  31. “The Liturgical Texts,” *FAED* 1, 357.
  32. Neslihan Şenocak, *The Poor and the Perfect: The Rise of Learning in the Franciscan Order, 1209–1310* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012), 31–2.

33. “The Kinship of Saint Francis,” *FAED* 3, 704–9.
34. Şenocak, *The Poor and the Perfect*, 36.
35. John Ahern, “Binding the Book: Hermeneutics and Manuscript Production in Paradiso 33,” *PMLA* 97:5 (October 1982): 800–9.
36. Bonaventure, *Doctoris seraphici S. Bonaventurae, Opera Omnia* (Quaracchi: Collegii S. Bonaventurae, 1882–1902), 8:334.
37. For a brief but suggestive discussion of seals showing Francis’s stigmatization, see Henk W. van Os, “St. Francis of Assisi as a Second Christ in Early Italian Painting,” *Simiolus: Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art* 7:3 (1974): 123.
38. Victor Lasareff, “Two Newly-Discovered Pictures of the Lucca School,” *Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* 51:293 (1927): 62.
39. Ernst H. Gombrich, “Bonaventura Berlinghieri’s Palmettes,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 39 (1976): 235.
40. “The Life of Saint Francis by Thomas of Celano,” *FAED* 1, 234–5.
41. Ahlquist and Cook, “The Representation of the Posthumous Miracles of St. Francis of Assisi in Thirteenth-Century Italian Painting,” 211–56.
42. “The Life of Saint Francis by Thomas of Celano,” *FAED* 1, 298.
43. Ahlquist and Cook, “The Representation of the Posthumous Miracles of St. Francis of Assisi in Thirteenth-Century Italian Painting,” 227.
44. For a useful discussion of the seraph, see Frugoni, *Francesco e l’invenzione delle stimmate*, 162–82.
45. Arnold I. Davidson points out that nothing in Thomas of Celano’s account designates the seraph as the cause of Francis’s stigmata; in other words, this is no cause-effect relationship. See “Miracles of Bodily Transformation, or How St. Francis Received the Stigmata,” *Critical Inquiry* 35:3 (Spring 2009): 460.
46. “The Life of Saint Francis by Thomas of Celano,” *FAED* 1, 263–4.
47. The differences between the scene of the stigmatization on the Berlinghieri panel and later ones are evident in Giotto’s version in the Upper Church of S. Francesco at Assisi, in the Louvre panel, and in the version in the Bardi Chapel at S. Croce, Florence.
48. “The Life of Saint Francis by Thomas of Celano,” *FAED* 1, 298.
49. Frugoni, *Francesco e l’invenzione delle stimmate*, 236–53.
50. Brooke, *The Image of St. Francis*, 171.
51. Rosser argues for the juxtaposition of naturalistic and nonnaturalistic modes in Duccio’s *Maestà* in “Beyond Naturalism in Art and Poetry,” 490–1.
52. “The Life of Saint Francis by Thomas of Celano,” *FAED* 1, 299.
53. For a discussion of the verbal and devotional practices meant to permeate the space between Gabriel and the Virgin in scenes of the Annunciation, see Ann van Dijk, “The Angelic Salutation in Early Byzantine and Medieval Annunciation Imagery,” *Art Bulletin* 81:3 (1999): 420–36.
54. For cases of demoniacs cured by Francis, see “The Life of Saint Francis by Thomas of Celano,” *FAED* 1, 301–2.
55. For an account of Francis’s abandonment of clothes, see *ibid.*, 92–4.
56. See the essays collected in E. Borsook and F. S. Gioffredi, eds., *Italian Altarpieces, 1250–1550: Function and Design* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993); and Victor M. Schmidt, ed., *Italian Panel Painting of the Duecento and Trecento* (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 2002).
57. Hellmut Hager, *Die Anfänge des italienischen Altarbildes; Untersuchungen zur Entstehungsgeschichte des toskanischen Hochaltarretabels* (Munich: A. Schroll, 1962), 88–100.

58. Klaus Krüger, *Der frühe Bildkult des Franziskus in Italien. Gestalt und Funktionswandel des Tafelbildes im 13 und 14 Jahrhundert* (Berlin: Gebr. Mann, 1992).
59. Beth Williamson, "Altarpieces, Liturgy, and Devotion," *Speculum* 79:2 (2004): 341–406.
60. For alternative suggestions of locations for similar biographical panels, see Joanna Cannon, "Beyond the Limitations of Visual Typology: Reconsidering the Function and Audience of Three Vita Panels of Women Saints, c. 1300," in Schmidt, *Italian Panel Painting*, 291.
61. See Wu Hung, "The Painted Screen," *Critical Inquiry* 23:1 (1996): 37–8, for a discussion of the differences between an image and an image-bearing object.
62. For an interesting discussion of the implications of being inscribed in a chain of poetic and artistic generation, see C. Jean Campbell, *The Commonwealth of Nature: Art and Poetic Community in the Age of Dante* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2008), 81–95.
63. See the studies by Rona Goffen, *Spirituality in Conflict: Saint Francis and Giotto's Bardi Chapel* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1988), 29–50, 103–11; Richard C. Trexler, *Naked before the Father: The Renunciation of Francis of Assisi* (New York: Peter Lang, 1989), 74; Krüger, *Der frühe Bildkult des Franziskus in Italien*, 119–28; Frugoni, *Francesco e l'invenzione delle stimmate*, 357–98; Eamon Duffy, "Finding St. Francis: Early Images, Early Lives," in P. Biller and A. Minnis, eds., *Medieval Theology and the Natural Body* (Rochester: York Medieval Press, 1997), 214–32; William R. Cook, *Images of St. Francis of Assisi, in Painting, Stone and Glass: From the Earliest Images to ca. 1320 in Italy; A Catalogue* (Florence: L. S. Olschki, 1999), 101; and Brooke, *The Image of St. Francis*, 176–92.
64. Brooke, *The Image of St. Francis*, 179.
65. The original location of the panel is unknown. It might have been in S. Croce in the thirteenth century, although it has been argued that it was brought to its present location in the Bardi chapel in 1595. See *ibid.*, 176, for discussion of this issue and the literature on it.
66. E. J. Stein, "Dating the Bardi St. Francis Master Dossal: Text and Image," *Franciscan Studies* 36 (1976): 271–97.
67. Frugoni, *Francesco e l'invenzione delle stimmate*, 357–98, and Goffen, *Spirituality in Conflict*, 29–50, 103–11.
68. Duffy, "Finding St. Francis," 215, and the comments by Brooke, *The Image of St. Francis*, 190–2. See also appendix II in Nick Havely, *Dante and the Franciscans: Poverty and the Papacy in the "Commedia"* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 190–1.
69. See "The Assisi Compilation," *FAED* 2, 138–40, 194–5.
70. *Ibid.*, 115.
71. See note 63.
72. "The Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul by Thomas of Celano," *FAED* 2, 275, 281, 293, 304, 305, 306, 362.
73. For a discussion of this episode, see Trexler, *Naked before the Father*.
74. Rosalind Brooke suggests that this scene derives from Bonaventure's *Legenda Maior*. See *The Image of St. Francis*, 183.
75. "The Life of Saint Francis by Thomas of Celano," *FAED* 1, 248.
76. *Ibid.*, 222.
77. *Ibid.*, 249–50.
78. *Ibid.*, 226; "The Major Legend of Saint Francis by Bonaventure of Bagnoregio," *FAED* 2, 570.

79. Brooke, *The Image of St. Francis*, 188.
80. “The Life of Saint Francis by Thomas of Celano,” *FAED* 1, 255; “The Major Legend of Saint Francis by Bonaventure of Bagnoregio,” *FAED* 2, 610.
81. Mulvaney, “The Beholder as Witness”; and “Standing on the Threshold,” 23–34.
82. “The Life of Saint Francis by Thomas of Celano,” *FAED* 1, 282–3.
83. See Duffy’s discussion of the scene in “Finding St. Francis: Early Images, Early Lives,” 229; Frugoni, *Francesco e l’invenzione delle stimmate*, 34–7; and Ahlquist and Cook, “The Representation of the Posthumous Miracles of St. Francis of Assisi in Thirteenth-Century Italian Painting,” 237–9.
84. Cook, *Images of St. Francis of Assisi*, 172–5; Frugoni, *Francesco e l’invenzione delle stimmate*, 339–45.
85. Brooke, *The Image of St. Francis*, 181.
86. See [note 10](#) herein and the discussion in [Chapter 3](#).
87. Frugoni, *Francesco e l’invenzione delle stimmate*, 341.
88. Anita Fiderer Moskowitz, *Nicola & Giovanni Pisano: The Pulpits; Pious Devotion, Pious Diversion* (London: Harvey Miller, 2005), 13–35.
89. Claire M. Waters, *Angels and Earthly Creatures: Preaching, Performance, and Gender in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 26–7.
90. Brooke, *The Image of St. Francis*, 174.
91. [Ibid.](#)
92. Donal Cooper, “‘In loco tutissimo et firmissimo’: The Tomb of St. Francis in History, Legend and Art,” in Cook, *The Art of the Franciscan Order in Italy*, 6.
93. [Ibid.](#), 9.
94. [Ibid.](#), 21–2.
95. Wood, “Perceptions of Holiness,” 305–6.
96. Mary Pardo, “Giotto and the ‘Things Not Seen, Hidden in the Shadows of Natural Ones,’” *Artibus et Historiae* 18:36 (1997): 41–53.

### Epilogue: Francis in Constantinople

1. Anne Derbes and Amy Neff, “Italy, the Mendicant Orders, and the Byzantine Sphere,” in Helen C. Evans, ed., *Byzantium: Faith and Power (1261–1557)* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2004), 449.
2. [Ibid.](#), 464.
3. C. L. Striker and Y. D. Kuban, eds., *Kalenderhane in Istanbul: The Buildings, Their History, Architecture and Decoration; Final Reports on the Archaeological Exploration and Restoration at Kalenderhane Camii, 1966–78* (Mainz: Verlag Philipp von Zabern, 1997), 132.
4. Derbes and Neff, “Italy, the Mendicant Orders, and the Byzantine Sphere,” 449.
5. See Striker and Kuban, *Kalenderhane in Istanbul*.
6. C. T. Maier, *Preaching the Crusades: Mendicant Friars and the Cross in the Thirteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 1.
7. [Ibid.](#), 20.
8. R. L. Wolff, “The Latin Empire of Constantinople and the Franciscans,” *Traditio* 2 (1944): 229–30.
9. Beata Kitsiki Panagopoulos’s study on the architecture of mendicant monasteries in Greece points us to instances of mendicant reuse of medieval Greek structures, but we have no information on the specific objects used within the walls of these buildings. See her book, *Cistercian and Mendicant Monasteries in*

- Medieval Greece* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979). Maria Georgopoulou's examination of mendicant churches on the island of Crete traces the furnishings and rites contained within the buildings but on the basis of records from much later periods. See *Venice's Mediterranean Colonies: Architecture and Urbanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).
10. Striker and Kuban, *Kalenderhane in Istanbul*, 1.
  11. *Ibid.*, 7.
  12. For details, see *ibid.*, 8–12.
  13. *Ibid.*, 16–17.
  14. R. Janin compiled a list of churches and monasteries in Catholic possession. See “Les sanctuaires de Byzance sous la domination latine,” *Études Byzantines* 2 (1944): 134–84. This list was added to by E. Dalleggio d’Alessio, “Les sanctuaires urbains et suburbains de Byzance sous la domination latine,” *Revue des Études Byzantines* 11 (1953): 50–61.
  15. Striker and Kuban, *Kalenderhane in Istanbul*, 16–17.
  16. Joanna Cannon, “Dominican Patronage of the Arts in Central Italy: The Provincia Romana, c. 1220–c. 1320” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of London, 1980), 97.
  17. *Ibid.*, 148.
  18. C. Gomez-Moreno, E. H. Jones, A. K. Wheelock Jr., and M. Meiss, “A Sienese St. Dominic Modernised Twice in the Thirteenth Century,” *AB* 51:4 (1969): 363–6.
  19. *Ibid.*, 364. They date the earliest image of Dominic on this panel to 1235–40 and argue that it was renewed in 1260, and given its final form in 1280–5.
  20. Cannon, “Dominican Patronage of the Arts,” 188. See also Klaus Krüger, *Der frühe Bildkult des Franziskus in Italien. Gestalt und Funktionswandel des Tafelbildes im 13 und 14 Jahrhundert* (Berlin: Gebr. Mann, 1992), 74–6.
  21. The second half of the duecento may well have seen more images of Dominic and Dominican saints. Chapter legislations of 1254 and 1256 recommend that images of Dominic be displayed in churches. See Cannon, “Dominic alter Christus? Representations of the Founder in and after the Arca di San Domenico,” in K. Emery Jr. and J. Wawrykow, eds., *Christ among the Medieval Dominicans: Representations of Christ in the Texts and Images of the Order of Preachers* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998), 26–48.
  22. See Cannon, review of Dieter Blume, *Wandmalerei als Ordenspropaganda, Bildprogramme im Chorbereich franziskanischer Konvente italiens bis zur Mitte des 14. Jahrhunderts*, *Heidelberger Kunstgeschichtliche* 17 (Worms, 1983), *Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* 127:(1985): 234–5.
  23. Striker and Kuban, *Kalenderhane in Istanbul*, 82–3, discusses in detail the changes in the diakonicon over centuries of rebuilding.
  24. *Ibid.*, 128.
  25. *Ibid.*, 129–42.
  26. *Ibid.*, 132–7.
  27. Derbes and Neff, “Italy, the Mendicant Orders, and the Byzantine Sphere,” 452.
  28. John of Parma, minister general of the Order from 1247 to 1257, was involved in Unionist negotiations and in 1254 had included the Eastern church fathers in the Franciscan calendar, which seems to accord with their depiction in a Franciscan chapel in the same period. See *ibid.*, 452.
  29. *Ibid.*
  30. Striker and Kuban, *Kalenderhane in Istanbul*, 138–40.

31. Sarah McNamer, *Affective Meditation and the Invention of Medieval Compassion* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 67–70.
32. For a compelling discussion of a similar case of self-affirmation, see J. Elsner, “Cultural Resistance and the Visual Image: The Case of Dura-Europos,” *Classical Philology* 96:3 (2001): 269–304.
33. Alice-Mary Talbot, “The Restoration of Constantinople under Michael VIII,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 47 (1993): 243–61.
34. Striker and Kuban, *Kalenderhane in Istanbul*, 148–50.
35. For the rhetorical comparison of images and the practice of *synkrisis*, see Henry Maguire, *Art and Eloquence in Byzantium* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981).





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## INDEX

- acheiropoietos*, 41, 51, 156  
*Akra Tapeinosis*, 71  
altarpiece, 183, 205  
    Pescia panel, 184  
*alter Christus*, 6, 16, 19, 22, 26, 126, 128, 130, 133, 144, 149, 151, 152, 156, 162, 164, 167, 168, 170, 189, 193, 199, 200, 204, 205, 216, 219, 244, 249, 252  
antithesis, 72  
artist  
    accuracy and, 64  
    as audience, 66  
    color and, 53  
    deviations of, 64  
    dream and, 42  
    equivocal status of, 62  
    generations of, 62  
    image in *Sacra Parallela*, 4  
    *Life of Irene of Chrysobalanton*, 58, 59  
    *Life of Kliment*, 62, 63  
    *Life of Mary of Vizye*, 42, 43  
    *Life of Nikon*, 48–53  
    *Life of Theodora of Thessalonike*, 39, 40, 41, 52  
    memory and, 43  
    as narrator, 49  
    paralysis of, 48, 49  
    reader as analogue to, 49  
    recognition on the part of, 51  
    representation and, 62  
    role of, 24, 32, 33, 35, 41, 62, 66  
    Second Council of Nicaea, 39  
*Assisi Compilation*, 187  
Azo, 133  
Bardi Master, 184  
Basil of Caesarea, 220, 229  
Bonaventura Berlinghieri, 15, 165, 168, 171, 173, 175, 176, 178, 179, 180, 182, 183, 184, 199, 209, 223, 239, 241, 252  
Bonaventure of Bagnoregio, 22, 128, 130, 133, 152–61, 163, 167, 172, 185, 198, 200, 220, 235, 238, 239, 241, 242, 243, 247  
*character*, 10  
*charakter*, 58, 59, 61, 66  
*ciborium*, 45, 76  
*clavi*, 19, 133, 140  
color  
    chroma, 54  
    form and, 53  
    *Life of Kliment*, 63  
    as residue, 53  
    sketch and, 53

- Dionysios of Fourna, 39  
*dolce stil nuovo*, 25  
 dream  
   in Byzantine novels, 39  
   Byzantine oneiromancy and, 39  
   *Life of Irene of Chrysobalanton*, 57  
   *Life of Mary of Vizeye*, 42, 43, 44  
   *Life of Theodora of Thessalonike*, 37, 39, 42  
   monastic treatises and, 124  
   Niketas Stethatos's conception of, 39  
   ontological status of, 39  
   prototype and, 44  
   St. Eustratios, 85  
   St. Nicholas, 90, 94, 102  
   status of, 34  
   trope of, 39  
   vision in, 38  
   vita icon/image and, 69, 91  
 dreams  
   states assumed by saints, 10
- eikon*, 2, 9, 21, 34, 45, 47, 52–62, 66, 215  
 ekphrasis, 12, 48, 49, 75, 76, 129, 220, 228  
*ektypo*, 52  
 Elizabeth of Spalbeek, 137  
*emphereia*, 21, 47, 52, 53, 54, 55, 66, 215  
 epiphany  
   St. Eustratios, 11  
 Eustathios of Thessalonike, 67  
 Evagrius, 124  
 extramission, 38, 86, 232
- Five Martyrs of Sebaste, 75  
 Fra Angelico, 15  
 frame  
   dialectic of center and, 13  
   potential for critique, 13
- Francis  
   *Assisi Compilation*, 187  
   example of living icon, 7  
   representation of, 7
- Franciscan  
   friars, 179, 189  
   habit, 189  
   hagiographies, 153  
   ideals, 186  
   literary and visual discourse of, 7  
   living icon, 12  
   Order, 138  
   Pescia panel, 174  
   precepts, 186  
   scholarship on, 20  
   visuality, 19, 186  
   vita icon/image, 183
- Franciscan Order, 22, 138, 150, 155, 186  
 art of, 166  
*Assisi Compilation*, 187  
 attitude to books, 172  
 biographies produced by, 22  
 Byzantium and, 167  
 charter, 165, 173  
 factions within, 185  
 ideals of, 167  
 illusionism and, 23, 206  
 innovation and, 205  
 philosophical and theological issues, 26  
 Pistoia panel, 199, 200  
 representation and, 26  
 Rule of, 127  
 St. Francis of Assisi and, 168  
 tomb of St. Francis, 205  
 vita icon/image and, 167
- Franciscans  
   affective response and, 170  
   Byzantine theology and, 26  
   Byzantium and, 167, 213  
   Constantinople and, 209, 212, 214  
   discourse of, 129, 141, 158  
   hagiographers, 128, 161  
   hagiographic practice of, 22  
   hagiographies of, 134, 206  
   identity and, 213  
   imagery and, 166, 168  
   in Levant, 207  
   literature of, 18, 129, 130, 161



- mentality of, 194  
 mode of viewing, 195  
 narrative clarity and, 170  
 naturalism and, 21  
 negotiations for Union, 208  
 prayer and, 167  
 precepts of, 167  
 Rule of, 158, 198  
 seals and, 155  
 texts, 136  
 vision, 187  
 visuality and, 167  
 vita icon/image and, 6, 19, 167, 168, 183, 206, 213
- Gregory of Sinai, 124
- hagiography  
   Byzantine and Franciscan, 130, 168  
   creativity of, 25, 34  
   decline of, 68, 69  
   as discursive arena, 33  
   dream sequence in, 39  
   ducento, 128  
   Franciscan, 134, 206  
   icons and, 2  
   interpretative models of, 27  
   philosophical concepts, 35  
   pictorial, 70  
   popularity of, 28, 33  
   radical possibilities of, 25  
   reader's response to, 36, 65  
   relation to signs, 10  
   relation to the "living statue," 5  
   representation and, 32, 33, 64, 66  
   rhetoric and, 35  
   role of, 25, 27  
   St. Demetrios, 44  
   St. John the Baptist, 113, 123  
   St. Nicholas, 91  
   stigmata and, 166  
   theology and, 25  
   visuality, 34  
   vita icon/image and, 88, 125  
   *Vita Prima*, 143
- Hodegetria, 65  
 Hugh of St. Victor, 142
- Iconoclasm, 2, 17, 18, 21, 24, 25, 32, 33, 34, 38, 44, 47–66, 125, 208, 219–26, 228, 247, 248, 249, 251, 256
- idol, 60, 61, 109
- Imperial menologion, 73, 74, 75
- John the Baptist, 113, 234, 249  
 John Tzetzes, 67, 68  
 Julian of Speyer, 127, 133, 138, 143, 145, 169, 235, 236, 237
- Kalenderhane Camii, 207
- Legend for Use in the Choir*, 134, 160, 169  
*Legend of the Three Companions*, 146  
 Leo of Chalcedon, 9, 24, 32, 33  
*Life of Irene of Chrysobalanton*, 36, 56, 57–61, 64  
*Life of Kliment*, 62, 63, 64  
*Life of Mary of Vizye*, 42, 43, 44, 47, 57, 64, 81  
*Life of Nikon*, 10, 36, 40, 47–61, 63, 64, 228, 230  
*Life of Pancratius*, 77  
*Life of Patriarch Nikephoros*, 33  
*Life of Theodora of Thessalonike*, 36, 37–44, 47, 51, 52, 64, 81  
*Life of Theoktiste of Lesbos*, 76
- "living icon"  
   beholder's share, 11  
   cultivation of virtue, 10  
   distinction between states, 11  
   ekphrasis, 12, 48  
   Francis's physical self, 12  
   Franciscan use of, 12  
   motion, 11  
   process of crafting, 12  
   Psellos's use of, 18  
   states of being, 10  
   visuality and, 21  
   vita icon/image and, 12, 69

- Major Legend*, 152, 153, 156, 157, 159, 163, 185, 190, 191, 198, 200
- Mandylion, 41, 51, 52, 125, 227, 229, 234, 238
- maniera greca*, 25
- Meditationes Vitae Christi*, 23, 240
- Melismos*, 71, 214
- menologion icons, 77, 78
- Metaphrastean menologion, 73, 74, 75, 77
- metapicture, 12, 15, 73
- Mitchell's definition of, 14
- mimesis
- Bardi panel, 186
- critique of, 68
- Franciscan practice of, 22
- imitation and, 130
- mimetic bonds, 31, 35, 66
- mimetic chain, 63
- mimetic expressions, 68
- mimetic identification, 130
- mimetic practice, 130, 152
- mimetic process, 68
- mimetic relationships, 31
- prototype and, 32
- representation and, 130, 184
- St. Francis of Assisi, 163
- stigmatization and, 130
- Minor Legend*, 160
- Monastery of St. Catherine at Sinai, 77, 78, 81, 90, 103, 115, 123
- morphe*, 21, 34, 43, 48, 52, 54, 55, 56, 58, 61, 66, 215
- naturalism, 166
- Nicholas Kabasilas, 124
- Niktetas Choniates, 67
- Niktetas Stethatos, 30, 31, 39, 54, 124, 224, 226, 253
- Oneirocriticon*, 39
- Patriarch Nikephoros, 9, 33, 34, 40, 61, 64, 220, 225, 226
- Pope Gregory IX, 133, 143, 144
- presence, 61
- altarpiece and, 183
- capturing, 215
- competing fields of holiness and, 81
- contested nature of, 9
- degrees of, 10, 21, 37, 47, 56
- as fluctuating quantity, 46
- hagiography and, 10, 35
- icon and, 2, 41, 44
- Iconoclasm and, 17
- inconstancy of, 42
- Jaeger's concept of, 18
- Life of Irene of Chrysobalanton*, 58, 59, 60, 61
- Life of Mary of Vizye*, 44
- Life of Nikon*, 11, 47, 50, 55
- Life of Theodora of Thessalonike*, 37, 38, 41, 44
- measure of, 10, 11
- parousia, 9
- Pescia panel, 16
- pictorial modes of, 21
- Pistoia panel, 202
- reflections on, 19
- relic and, 44
- in relic and icon, 34
- representation and, 46
- saint's portrait and, 62
- sign, 9
- St. Demetrios, 45, 46
- St. Eustratios, 83, 85, 86
- St. Nicholas, 94, 98
- stigmata and, 19
- Symeon Eulabes and, 32
- visibility and, 86
- vita icon/image and, 2, 112
- Proclus, 54
- prototype
- appearance in dream, 39
- definition of, 33
- icon and, 31, 32, 33, 34, 39, 40, 54, 62, 64, 65, 66, 88, 90, 101, 125
- inscription and, 50
- John of Damascus's definition, 35
- Life of Irene of Chrysobalanton*, 60, 61
- Life of Kliment*, 64

- Life of Nikon*, 52, 53, 54  
*Life of Theodora of Thessalonike*, 39  
 matter and, 54  
 name of, 57, 64  
 Patriarch Nikephoros's definition, 34, 35  
 representation and, 47, 51, 62, 68, 69  
 saint's portrait and, 62  
 St. Nicholas, 102  
 synonyms, homonyms and, 101  
 tactility and, 54  
 vita icon/image and, 88  
 Psellos Michael, 11, 18, 32, 33, 54, 64, 219, 220, 227, 229, 247, 248, 256
- relic  
 altarpiece and, 183  
 appearance in dream, 39  
 Assisi panel, 203, 204, 205  
 depictions of, 66  
 discussion of the image in the Sacra Parallela, 4  
 icon and, 2, 34, 35, 41, 44, 47, 66, 70  
 idol, 61  
 images of, 81  
*Life of Mary of Vizye*, 43, 44  
*Life of Nikon*, 47, 52  
*Life of Theodora of Thessalonike*, 37, 40, 41, 42, 44  
 Mandylion, 52  
 martyrdom and, 10, 78  
 Pescia panel, 16  
 Pistoia panel, 202  
 powers and limits of, 34  
 presence and, 41, 42, 44, 46  
 primary and secondary, 37  
 prototype and, 44  
 relationship to icons, 215  
 St. Demetrios, 45, 46  
 St. Eustratios, 11, 81–6  
 St. Francis of Assisi, 168, 206  
 St. George, 110  
 St. John the Baptist, 113, 114, 115, 118, 123  
 St. Nicholas, 80
- state assumed by a saint, 10  
 vita icon/image and, 69  
 representation  
 contested nature of, 9  
 Patriarch Nikephoros's definition, 9  
 saint and, 2, 3  
 vita icon/image and, 1
- Sanctitatis Nova Signa*, 171  
 secret  
 de Certeau's conception of, 138  
 Hillis Miller's conception of, 137  
 Kermode's conception of, 136  
*signa*, 131, 132, 133, 134, 140, 149, 160  
 St. Basil of Caesarea, 3, 11, 12, 28, 48, 49, 60, 61, 64  
 St. Catherine, 14, 15  
 St. Damiano, 127, 147, 148, 151  
 St. Demetrios, 44, 45, 46, 227, 247  
 St. Eustratios, 11, 21, 76, 81–6, 90, 134, 230, 232  
 St. Francis of Assisi, 127, 128, 130, 132, 133, 134, 145  
*acheiropoietos*, 156  
 as charter, 165, 173  
*Assisi Compilation*, 187  
 Assisi panel, 203, 204, 211  
 attitude to books, 172  
 Bardi panel, 185–98  
 biographies of, 22, 152, 153  
 body as the surface of a painting, 12  
 body of, 22, 127, 133, 134, 143, 144, 145, 151, 154, 155, 156, 161, 164, 165, 170, 172, 173, 195, 200, 205, 206  
 Bonaventure, 153  
 book binding and, 172  
 canonization of, 143, 144, 145  
 configuration of, 23  
 Constantinople and, 207, 209, 210–14  
 corpse of, 143  
 different states, 12  
 emergence of, 6  
 image and medium, 135  
 images of, 164, 209

- St. Francis of Assisi (cont.)  
 imitation, 130  
 Julian of Speyer, 143, 145  
*Legend for Use in the Choir*, 134, 135  
 “living icon,” 12  
*Major Legend*, 156, 157, 158, 159  
*Minor Legend*, 160, 161  
 as owner/bearer, 134  
 Pescia panel, 15, 16, 169–82, 184, 209  
 physical nature of, 26  
 Pistoia panel, 198–203  
 representation and, 140  
 representation of, 164  
 Sacro Speco, Subiaco, 164  
*Sanctitatis Nova Signa*, 171  
 sealing and, 154, 155, 156, 200  
 secrecy of, 137, 138, 139  
 sight and, 139  
 stigmata and, 129, 132, 136, 143, 144, 163, 164, 165, 166, 195  
 stigmatization and, 22, 130, 131, 162  
 textual lives of, 127  
 tomb of, 204, 205  
*Treatise on the Miracles*, 148–52, 163  
 Uffizi panel, 141, 142  
 vision of, 131  
 visual and tactile access and, 23  
 vita icon/image and, 23, 27, 126, 165, 166, 167, 168, 172, 205, 206, 209  
*Vita Prima*, 131, 134, 139, 140, 141, 157, 169  
*Vita Secunda*, 145, 146, 147, 148  
 witness and, 137
- St. George, 1, 40, 70, 71, 78, 87, 88, 103, 118  
 vita icon/image, 112  
 vita icon/image (Athens), 111, 112  
 vita icon/image (Sinai), 104, 105, 107, 109, 110
- St. Gregory of Nazianzos, 11, 54, 219, 220
- St. Gregory of Nyssa, 3
- St. John of Damascus, 63, 64, 124, 167
- St. John the Baptist, 1, 40, 70, 81, 86, 113, 114, 115, 118, 123
- St. Mary of Vizey, 43
- St. Nicholas, 1, 70, 78, 79, 80, 86, 89, 90, 91, 94, 98, 102, 103, 104, 112  
 vita icon/image, 112
- St. Nicholas, panel, 78
- St. Nikon, 220, 228, 258
- Staurakios Oxeobaphos, 67
- Stephen of Nicomedia, 31, 32, 224
- stigmata  
 appearance and disappearance of, 164  
 Assisi panel, 204  
 Bardi panel, 185, 186, 193  
 Bonaventure, 153  
 books as analogs of, 172  
 Brother Rufino, 139  
 controversies, 7  
 depictions of, 128, 164  
 description of, 19, 130, 131, 133, 161  
 Elizabeth of Spalbeek, 137  
 enigma of, 161  
 legal issues and, 129  
*Legend for Use in the Choir*, 134, 135  
*Major Legend*, 156, 158, 159  
 metaphors of, 129  
*Minor Legend*, 160, 161  
 ornamental status of, 171, 172, 174, 199  
 ownership of, 134  
 Pescia panel, 15, 169–74, 184  
 Pistoia panel, 200, 202  
 precision regarding, 135  
 problems regarding, 12, 145  
 as representations, 7  
 Sacro Speco, Subiaco, 164  
 and sealing, 129, 154, 155, 156  
 secret nature of, 18, 129, 136, 137, 138  
 as signifiers, 129  
 as signs, 128, 132
- St. Francis of Assisi, 127, 133, 150, 163, 164, 206

- Treatise on the Miracles*, 148, 150, 151, 152, 163  
 Uffizi panel, 142  
*Vita Prima*, 136, 139, 140, 152, 169, 171  
*Vita Secunda*, 147, 148, 152
- stigmatization  
   and sealing, 154, 155, 156  
   Bardi panel, 186, 189, 191–95, 197  
   challenges of describing, 2  
   description of, 161  
   Julian of Speyer, 145  
   *Legend for Use in the Choir*, 134  
   *Major Legend*, 153, 156, 159  
   metaphors of, 129  
   mimesis and, 130  
   paradox of, 128  
   Pescia panel, 171, 176, 177, 178, 181  
   Pistoia panel, 198, 200  
   secret nature of, 128, 137  
   St. Francis of Assisi, 162  
   textual accounts of, 19  
   *Treatise on the Miracles*, 148, 150, 151, 152  
   Uffizi panel, 142  
   *Vita Prima*, 131, 140, 157  
   *Vita Secunda*, 146, 147, 148
- Symeon Eulabes, 30, 31, 32, 65, 69, 224  
 Symeon Metaphrastes, 73
- taphos*, 45
- templon beam, 72, 73, 87, 88  
   St. Eustratios, 81, 82, 83, 85, 86, 90  
   vita icon/image and, 87
- The New Theologian, Symeon, 18, 24, 30, 31, 32, 224, 248, 252
- Theodora of Thessalonike, 41, 226, 227, 229
- Theodore Balsamon, 67, 68  
 Theodore of Stoudios, 33, 40, 57, 64, 101
- Theophylact of Ohrid, 62, 63, 64
- Thomas of Celano, 22, 127–51, 157, 158, 160, 163, 169, 170, 171, 175, 177, 184, 185, 187, 189, 195, 198, 222, 225, 234–43, 256
- Treatise on the Miracles*, 145, 148, 149, 151, 152  
   stigmata, 163
- typos*, 53
- vision  
   Bardi panel, 191, 192, 198  
   competing theories of, 38  
   direct and indirect, 37  
   extramission, 38  
   Franciscan concept of, 27  
   icon and, 66  
   *Life of Irene of Chrysobalanton*, 56, 57, 60, 61  
   *Life of Nikon*, 48, 55  
   *Major Legend*, 156, 158  
   monastic treatises and, 124  
   ontological states and, 13  
   Pescia panel, 16, 175  
   Pistoia panel, 199  
   St. Eustratios, 11, 83, 85  
   St. Francis of Assisi, 131, 132, 150, 168  
   St. Nicholas, 91, 94, 102  
   state assumed by a saint, 10  
   Symeon the New Theologian, 18  
   *Treatise on the Miracles*, 152  
   vita icon/image and, 1, 166, 167  
   *Vita Secunda*, 148
- vita icon/image  
   absence and, 112  
   as agent of exchange, 213  
   “aesthetic of interruption and,” 90  
   ancestors of, 87  
   Assisi panel, 203, 204, 211  
   Bardi panel, 195, 198  
   Byzantine and Franciscan concerns and, 17  
   Byzantine sources of, 167  
   Christ, Theotokos and, 125  
   commentary on visual mediation, 2

- vita icon/image (cont.)  
 crafting of, 123  
 demise of, 125  
 different kinds of spectatorship, 13  
 diffusion of, 6  
 display of, 89  
 emergence of, 2, 88, 215  
 as equivocal representation, 15  
 Franciscan, 23, 26, 27, 166, 167, 168, 206  
 iconographic registers, 69  
 intellectual developments relating to, 6  
 iterative qualities of, 28  
 Kalenderhane Camii, 208, 210, 211, 213, 215  
 legitimization and, 211  
 link between Byzantium and Italy, 12  
 “living” icon and, 5  
 Mandylion, 125  
 metapicture and, 13, 14  
 monastic context and, 124  
 nomenclature and, 14  
 ontological complexity and, 70  
 origins of, 123  
 Pescia panel, 15  
 pictorial categories of, 13  
 Pistoia panel, 198  
 popularity of, 123  
 potential for critique, 13  
 presence and, 86  
 problems with, 125, 126  
 prototype and, 69, 88  
 reading practices and, 124  
 replication and, 88  
 representation and, 15, 16  
 role of, 5, 6  
 scholarly consensus regarding, 5  
 self-reflexivity of, 123  
 sequential narrative and, 89  
 St. Francis of Assisi, 126, 165, 166, 167, 172, 206  
 St. George, 103  
 St. George (Sinai), 111, 112  
 St. John the Baptist, 114, 115, 118  
 St. Marina, 87  
 St. Nicholas, 78, 90, 102, 112  
 templon beam and, 73, 87  
*Vita of Symeon the New Theologian*, 30  
*Vita Prima*, 131, 133, 134, 136, 138, 143, 146–54, 157, 169, 171, 174, 184, 189, 190, 191, 195, 198  
*Vita Secunda*, 145–49, 152, 159, 187
- witness  
 Bardi panel, 193  
*Charters of Christ*, 155  
 contested notion of, 22  
 Franciscan notion of, 27  
*Major Legend*, 159  
*Minor Legend*, 160  
 papal statutes and, 19  
 Pescia panel, 173, 177, 178, 181, 184  
 Roman curia and, 129  
 St. Francis of Assisi, 155, 162  
 stigmatization and, 129, 162  
 Thomas of Celano, 137, 151  
*Treatise on the Miracles*, 151, 163  
 vita icon/image and, 166, 167  
*Vita Secunda*, 148, 152